THE PROBLEM OF MUSICAL MEANING

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Wisconsin-Madison in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

BY

LLEN
Paul A. Brown

Degree to be awarded: December 19 75 May 19_____ August 19_____

Approved by Thesis Reading Committee:

Donald W. Crawford
Major Professor

September 18, 1975
Date of Examination

Ivan Soll

W H Hay

Robert M. Bock
Dean, Graduate School

THE PROBLEM OF MUSICAL MEANING

BY
LLEN
PAUL A. BROWN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Philosophy

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

1975

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION. 1

- 1) Musical Formalism. 2
- 2) Meaning in Absolute Music. 6

CHAPTER ONE: MUSICAL MEANING AND THE EXPRESSION THEORY 14

- 1) Statement of the Expression Theory 15
- 2) Criticism of the Expressionist Analysis. . . . 19

CHAPTER TWO: MUSIC AS A PRESENTATIONAL SYMBOL OF FEELING: SUZANNE LANGER'S THEORY. 29

- 1) Langer's Theory of Music 30
- 2) Criticism of Langer's Assumptions about Symbolism. 40
- 3) Criticism of Langer's Assumptions about Feeling and Language 47
- 4) Criticism of Langer's Theory of Music as a Presentational Symbol 54
- 5) Conclusion 60

CHAPTER THREE: MUSIC AS LANGUAGE OF FEELING. 62

- 1) Music as the Language of Feeling 64
- 2) Cooke's Theory of Music as Expressive Language 70
- 3) Critical Discussion of the Theory. 76
  - a) Creativity 77
  - b) Cooke's Theory of Music as Language. . . . 86
  - c) Musical Experience 90
- 4) Summary and Conclusion 107

CHAPTER FOUR: MEANING IN ABSOLUTE MUSIC. 109

- 1) Musical Expressive Meaning 111
- 2) The Relevance of Musical Meaning to Appreciation 128
- 3) The Aesthetic Value of Musical Meaning 136

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 153

INTRODUCTION

Is absolute, or non-representational, music a totally abstract art devoid of any suggestiveness or reference to human life? If so, then how shall we account for the high worth that such music is alleged to have? Or, is absolute music intimately related to human affective experience as a symbol or language of feeling? But, if so, then how shall it be maintained that music without a program or descriptive title can function to express, communicate, or convey such states to others? The answers to these questions have preoccupied musical aesthetics for the past hundred years, but in spite of this length of time, what has emerged is not progress in developing an adequate theory of absolute music, but a calcifying into two rival positions. Accordingly, absolute music is maintained to be either a temporally organized pattern of sounds, or a symbolic medium for the communication of the composer's affective experiences.

The resolution of these opposing theories on the nature of absolute music is what I shall call "the problem of musical meaning," and shall constitute the subject of the present essay. What such a dispute suggests, and what I shall show to be the case, is that wrong assumptions are being made initially, and that philosophical inquiry is needed in order to bring out these crucial assumptions for examination and discussion. It is the main goal of this essay to reconcile these theories, and, in so doing, establish a viable position on musical meaning and its value. The position that shall be taken will preserve certain tenets of each of these views, and shall be a synthesis of them.

In this introduction my primary purpose is to sketch out these rival theories in order to provide an acquaintance with the problem. First, I shall provide a brief explanation of the doctrine that denies that absolute music has meaning, the position which I shall call "Musical Formalism." Secondly, I shall set forth the rival theories which hold that music does have meaning, and that musical meaning is the key to understanding the value of absolute music. The argument of the body of this essay will then be summarized together with the conclusion I shall establish.

1) Musical Formalism.

The doctrine of Formalism in music was put forth in the Nineteenth Century by Edward Hanslick in *The Beautiful in Music*[1] and Edmund Gurney in *The Power of Sound*.[2] Both of these works constitute a position on the nature and value of absolute music. Absolute music is not defined in these works, but what their authors have in mind is music having no program and best exemplified by the forms of symphony, sonata, and the concerto. The central thesis of both Hanslick and Gurney is that the appreciation and value of absolute music depends upon attending to it as a temporally organized pattern of sounds and nothing more. According to their thesis, absolute music is a kind of music which is devoid of any referential or representational content, and is nothing more than, using Hanslick's phrase, "sounding forms in motion."[3] Thus, one should notice in appreciating absolute music such features as melody, rhythm, theme, variation, balance, symmetry, and unity, to name the most salient organizational features emphasized by these writers. In appreciating Brahms' *Variations on a Theme of Haydn*, for example, one should attend to the grace and elegance of the opening melody, the intricate way in which it is varied, the play of themes in counterpoint with one another, the development and changing of the tonal patterns. Only in noting these formal features, according to this view, can the value of absolute music be discovered. Musical value is explained in terms of the beautiful where the beautiful is valuable in and for itself. Absolute music, according to Formalism, has no utility other than the experience which it provides.

---

[1] Edward Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1957).

[2] Edmund Gurney, *The Power of Sound* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966).

---

[3] Hanslick, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

The motivation for the Formalist doctrine of Hanslick and Gurney was the increasing popularity of a rival position on the nature of absolute music. The doctrine that was rapidly gaining advocacy in their time was that the nature and function of absolute music was the expression of the feelings of the composer. The main formulation of this position maintains that the way to appreciate absolute music is by attending to the feelings it expresses, and experiencing them as far as one's own constitution will allow. Both Hanslick and Gurney reacted to this position because it suggested that musical organization counted neither in musical appreciation nor musical value, and all that did count was understanding the feelings allegedly expressed by the composer. Hanslick went so far as to maintain that music could not express the composer's feelings at all, but at best it could only bear resemblances to the "dynamic" features of emotion in the form of tension, stress, movement and so on. Although Gurney held that music could express emotions and feelings,[4] both were unanimous in their conviction that attention to anything absolute music might happen to resemble, or express, whether human emotions or anything else, was irrelevant to its appreciation and value.

It is interesting to note that the views of Hanslick and Gurney on the nature of absolute music have persisted in the Twentieth Century. The neo-classical composers Igor Stravinsky[5] and Paul Hindemith[6] have written books on their art advocating what amounts to a Formalist position on absolute music. Stravinsky, in particular, echoes Hanslick when he claims that "music is, by its very nature, powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc. . . ."[7] Both of these composers were profoundly opposed to the Romantic style of their immediate predecessors and wished to start a new direction in musical composition. In their case this amounted to a return to the old styles of their predecessors in the Baroque tradition, a return to the contrapuntal style of Bach and Handel.

---

[4] Gurney, op. cit., pp. 312-48.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Formalism has resurged in contemporary musical aesthetics. In his preface to The Beautiful in Music, Morris Weitz writes in reference to the issue of musical meaning that many philosophers "recognize the clarity and force of his (Hanslick's) way of putting the problem and the credibility of his solution," so that even now Hanslick "remains the force he always was."[8] Similarly, Monroe Beardsley in his discussion of musical meaning professes himself to be "in substantial agreement" with "the Formalist view of music" set forth by Hanslick.[9] I shall have more to say about Formalism, but for now I shall introduce the opposing theory of absolute music.

---

[5] Igor Stravinsky, Poetics of Music (New York: Random House, 1947).

[6] Paul Hindemith, A Composer's World (New York: Doubleday, 1961).

[7] Igor Stravinsky, Chronicle of My Life, quoted by Deryck Cooke in The Language of Music (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 11.

2) Meaning in Absolute Music.

Contrasted with the position of musical Formalism are a number of positions holding that absolute music does have a meaning in some sense. A large number of writers have been dissatisfied with the tenets of Formalism and have held that absolute music is more than a totally abstract art devoid of any relation to things other than itself. The most widely held and influential of these positions develops the thesis Hanslick and Gurney sought to attack, the thesis that music is intimately related to the affective life of the composer. In so doing, the advocates of this position continue a line of thought that had its origins in the Nineteenth Century, the age of Romanticism, and was originally argued for the case of poetry.[10]

---

[8] Morris Weitz, Introduction to Hanslick's The Beautiful in Music, op. cit., pp. xii-xiii.

[9] Monroe Beardsley, Aesthetics (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1958), p. 338.

[10] Monroe Beardsley, A Short History of Aesthetics (New York: The Macmillin Co., 1966), pp. 244-58.

Many of those who have been attracted to this position argue it for the general case of art, not limiting themselves specifically to music. For example, in What is Art?,[11] Leo Tolstoy holds that the nature and function of art is to communicate the artist's feelings and emotions to its beholders by evoking these states in them. The value of such an endeavor, according to Tolstoy, is to change men's moral attitudes and create a love for mankind. A similar position has been argued for the case of the art of absolute music in particular by J. W. N. Sullivan[12] who it should be noted puts forth his theory explicitly in opposition to the Formalist theory of Gurney. Sullivan too holds the view that music communicates the affective experience of the composer, but holds that the value of such communication is to enrich our experience and make our own lives more worthwhile thereby.

That music does have meaning and is not a totally abstract art is widely assumed in musical circles as well. For example, Wilfred Mellars affirms in Man and His Music that there is uniform agreement that music has meaning and that "music 'conveys' experience as a language does. . . ."[13]

---

[11] Leo Tolstoy, What is Art? (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill and Co., 1957).

[12] J. W. N. Sullivan, Beethoven: His Spiritual Development (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1927).

[13] Wilfred Mellars and Alec Harman, Man and His Music (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 573.

Again, the critic Robert Layton writes without further elaboration that "any work of art is a considered reaction to the artist's experience of life and the value of the work must be assessed in relation to the positiveness of the reaction."[14] These comments have reference to absolute music, not to Programme Music having an autobiographical reference such as Dvorak's overture My Home. It is assumed by these writers that the function of absolute music is to convey the experience of the composer.

The motivation for holding to this theory for absolute music is twofold. First, there is conviction among its advocates that Formalism simply cannot be correct as a theory of music on the grounds that, if it were, music would be of the same value as mere ornamentation or decoration. According to Sullivan, for example, the Formalist position places the lover of music in the same category as the wine-bibber in that both are mere hedonists savoring the pleasures of what is gratifying to the senses. Music, however, is thought to have high cultural value and to be worth preserving for future generations. If it can be shown that music functions cognitively, by communicating the composer's experience to others enabling them to improve their lives, then its value will be explained, and it will be shown to be much more than the mere tapestry of pleasing sounds that the Formalists maintain.

---

[14] Robert Layton, "Martinu and the Czech Tradition," from The Symphony, (Vol. II), edited by Robert Simpson (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 227.

Secondly, there is a further conviction that Formalist theory does not do justice to the emotional nature of musical experience. If Formalist theory were true, then the responses to good music should be nothing more than the pleasures accruing from the experience of good design. But, in fact, too many composers, critics, and music lovers attest that musical experience is far more emotionally diverse in nature than the Formalist position suggests. People describe music using emotion terms, and claim that it affects them often in a very profound way. They would maintain that these responses are not at all irrelevant to the proper perception of absolute music, but an integral part of it. Any person who listened to a Beethoven symphony only as thematic statement and development in sonata form, on their view, would miss the most important parts of the composition.

A main purpose of this essay is to consider the most important arguments in support of the position that music has a meaning related to human experience. The main source of arguments for this position is the philosophical theory of art known as "The Expression Theory." It is held on this theory for the case of music that the nature of musical composition is the expression of the composer's feelings and, in virtue of this, a musical composition is truly described as the expression of his feelings. Musical appreciation, then, consists in becoming aware of the feelings expressed by the music. This position has achieved a wide popularity in aesthetic theory, including among its most distinguished advocates, Benedetto Croce,[15] R. G. Collingwood,[16] E. F. Carritt,[17] C. J. Ducasse,[18] and John Dewey.[19] In the first chapter of this essay, I shall examine the main considerations for the position that musical composition is best understood as the expression of the composer's feelings. I shall argue against this position by showing that musical composition is not the expression of feeling in at least the ordinary sense of this term. Furthermore, I shall argue that even if it were, one could not simply conclude that the created musical product was the expression of the composer's feelings.

It will not follow from these considerations, however, that the case for musical meaning cannot be made out, for

---

[15] Benedetto Croce, Aesthetic (New York: Noonday Press, 1963).

[16] R. G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938).

[17] E. F. Carritt, What is Beauty? (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1932).

[18] C. J. Ducasse, The Philosophy of Art (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966).

[19] John Dewey, Art as Experience (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958).

"expression" is a notoriously ambiguous word. At most what will follow is that the Expression theorists are guilty of creating considerable confusion with their claims by failing to distinguish some relevant senses of this term which may be used in aesthetic contexts. For example, one possible meaning of "expression" is "symbolic representation," so that the claim that the composer expresses feeling may mean that he symbolically represents it or records it in his music in such a way that we can become aware of it. Musical experience would then be a kind of understanding by means of symbols and would be closely related to the understanding of meaning in language.

It is this line of argument that has influenced Suzanne Langer's theory of the arts, and Chapter Two shall be devoted to a thorough examination and discussion of her position. On Langer's theory musical compositions are symbols whereby the composer tells us what he knows about feeling. The position that music functions to record the personal experience of the composer is explicitly rejected by Langer who holds instead that music can record knowledge about feeling in the same manner in which language can be used to record knowledge about matters of fact. This is obviously an ambitious position and one that has been influential.[20] I shall argue that Langer is mistaken about a number of her assumptions in relation to symbolism, language, and feeling, and that she fails to establish her theory.

---

[20] See Gordon Epperson, The Musical Symbol (Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1967), and L. A. Reid, Meaning in the Arts, (New York: Humanities Press, 1970).

The most widely held position about musical meaning, however, has still to be considered. This is the position that music is an autobiographical representation of the composer's own affective experience. On this account, the composer records his own affective experience in the creation of absolute music, and we come to share this experience by listening to his music. This is the position of Tolstoy about art generally, of Sullivan, and of the critics mentioned above. Yet the crucial question of how music could be used in this fashion to communicate states of feeling has received almost no attention. If music functions in the manner required by this theory, it should be shown that there exists a means whereby feelings could be made known to others via this medium. Yet, the only attempt that has been made to show the possibility of musical communication of affective experience is a theory put forward quite recently by Deryck Cooke in The Language of Music.[21] In Chapter Three I shall set forth and criticize Cooke's argument purporting to show that absolute music is a language which functions to communicate the composer's affective experience and shall argue that it is not the nature of absolute music to be used to communicate experience because it cannot do so.

---

[21] Deryck Cooke, The Language of Music (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

It is not my aim, however, in these critical chapters to establish that music has no meaning and support the Formalist position that music is patterned sound and nothing more. In the final chapter of this essay, I shall present a position which preserves the insights of both the Formalist and Expressionist theories of music. I shall argue that the Expressionists are correct in their assertion that music has meaning, even though they are mistaken in thinking that musical meaning is necessarily linked to the affective experience of the composer. It shall be argued that, on the contrary, musical meaning has aesthetic, rather than cognitive, value. In holding that musical meaning has aesthetic value, I shall be agreeing with a part of Formalist musical aesthetics which maintains that absolute music is aesthetically valuable, but I shall disagree with the Formalists by holding that the aesthetic value of music includes its capacity of expression.

CHAPTER ONE

MUSICAL MEANING AND THE EXPRESSION THEORY

One reason for holding that music has meaning is the conviction that what the composer does in the activity of composition is properly thought of as expressing his feelings. If this conviction is true, it has been supposed to follow that the work is properly deemed his expression, and the proper experience of the work the understanding of what it expresses. In order to evaluate the claim that music has meaning, then, we need to know what reasons there are for holding that musical composition is properly called the expression of the composer's feelings and what is meant by this claim. The most articulate advocates of this position are those who have put forward the Expression Theory of art, so it will be appropriate to state the claims made about expression by some of the leading defenders of this theory. Accordingly, I shall examine the doctrine of expression set forth by R. G. Collingwood, John Dewey, and E. F. Carritt, all of whom exhibit near uniform agreement of what counts as an instance of expression of feeling. My aim in the following discussion is to show that the considerations brought forth by these theorists do not suffice to show their case to be made out for the art of music.

1) Statement of the Expression Theory.

The basic claim of the Expression theorists is that the process of creating a work of art is the expression of the feelings of the artist. In making this claim they seek to define artistic activity in terms of the expression of feelings, so that they would wish to claim not only that all artistic activity properly so called is the expression of the feelings of the artist, but all add only artistic activity is such expression. They seek, therefore, to provide a statement of the essence of artistic creation. In so doing they distinguish between cases which are sometimes referred to as expressions of feeling, but are not really so, and those cases which are true expressions. It is claimed that cases which are sometimes referred to as expressions of feeling are really cases of giving vent to feelings, or exhibiting symptoms of feelings. For example, Collingwood states the following:

> When it is said that the artist in the proper sense of that word is a person who expresses his emotions, this does not mean that if he is afraid he turns pale and stammers; if he is angry he turns red and bellows; and so forth. These things are no doubt called expressions; but just as we distinguish proper and improper senses of the word "art," so we must distinguish proper and improper senses of the word "expression," and in the context of a discussion about art this sense of expression is an improper sense.[1]

Actually, according to Collingwood, turning red and bellowing in anger, and turning pale and stammering with fear, are not cases of expression of emotion, but are cases of the betrayal of it.

---

[1] R. G. Collingwood, *op*. *cit*., pp. 121-2.

This same distinction is echoed in the writings of other expression theorists. Thus, according to John Dewey, there is a difference between expressing a feeling and "the mere giving way to an impulsion."[2] In this latter case

> there is activity, but not, from the standpoint of the one acting, expression. An onlooker may say "What a magnificent expression of rage!" But the enraged being is only raging, quite a different matter from expressing rage.[3]

Similarly, in E. F. Carritt:

> There may be many signs or consequences of feeling, perhaps peculiar to an individual, or perhaps recognizable by doctors or other beholders, which are not expressions. A scream or cry need not by itself be expressive of pain, though it is usually a sign of it. . . . Neither is sweating or changing of the pulse expression.[4]

From these statements, one may infer that the Expression theorists hold that there is considerable confusion about what constitutes a true case of expression of feelings, and that reference to certain cases as expressions results from a confusion between expression and something else, variously called "betraying," "giving vent to," or "giving signs of" feelings. On their view, this confusion has prevented the recognition that it is only what artists do that really amounts to expression of feeling. Let us now turn to their positive account of expression of feelings as the activity of artists, and the theory of art that results.

---

[2] John Dewey, op. cit., p. 61.

[3] Ibid., p. 61.

[4] E. F. Carritt, "Beauty as Expression," from Introductory Readings in Aesthetics, edited by John Hospers (New York: The Free Press, 1969), pp. 130-1.

There are two conditions that are insisted on for the proper expression of feeling. First, it is maintained that artists experience the feelings they express in the process of creating their works. For example, Dewey holds that "emotional discharge is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of expression."[5] It is not sufficient in virtue of the examples given above where someone may experience a feeling but only give vent to it rather than express it. Not only must the feeling be experienced, then, for expression to occur, but it must in addition be the case that it is clarified. Collingwood is clear on this point:

> When a man is said to express emotion, what is said about him comes to this. At first, he ~~is~~ conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this emotion is. All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement, which he feels going on within him, but of whose nature he is ignorant. . . . From this helpless and oppressed condition he extricates himself by doing something which we call expressing himself.[6]

The process of expressing a feeling enables the artist to know precisely the feeling that he experienced vaguely before. It is done intentionally, or on purpose, with a deliberation that is not shared by someone who is merely giving vent to his feelings.

---

[5] Ibid., p. 61.

[6] Collingwood, op. cit., p. 109.

The definition of art given by the Expressionists is based on these claims about creation. It is claimed that in virtue of the creative act being the expression of emotion, the art product is the expression of the emotion of the artist. Thus, the theory of creation tells us what art really is, according to these theorists, in that all and only works of art are properly referred to as expressions of feeling. Dewey, for example, states this when he says that, "expression as personal act and as objective result are organically connected with one another."[7]

This definition of art leads to a claim about the experience of artworks. On their view the understanding of such a work is just the understanding of the feeling which the work expresses, which in turn is the feeling which the artist experienced and clarified in creating the work. There is a difference, however, in how such understanding is achieved. Collingwood holds that the expressed feeling is recognized by means of the work, drawing a clear distinction between recognition of expressed feeling and the emotive effects the work may have on one. Carritt, on the other hand, holds that the feeling expressed is reexperienced by the person who beholds the work, so that the proper affective response made to the work is identical to the feeling that was expressed by the artist.

---

[7] Dewey, op. cit., p. 82.

2) Criticism of the Expressionist Analysis.

Let us now proceed to discuss the main claim of these theorists, that the creative activity of art is properly thought of as the expression of emotion. In particular, let us ask what positive argument is offered to support the claim that only the creative activity of artists is properly deemed "expression of feelings." Consider what Collingwood says about this.

> Our first question is this. Since the artist proper has something to do with emotion, and what he does with it is not arouse it, what is it that he does? It will be remembered that the kind of answer we expect to this question is an answer derived from what we all know and all habitually say; nothing original or recondite, but something entirely commonplace.
>
> Nothing could be more entirely commonplace than to say he expresses them (sic.).[8]

Collingwood simply takes it as a fact that what artists do is express their emotions in the creative activity of art. He considers his purpose simply to elucidate "what we all know by clearing up the distinction between expressing feeling and evincing it." Yet, even if this assumption is commonplace, this obviously does not guarantee its truth.

Indeed, rather than argue positively for this claim the Expression theorists, including Dewey as well, argue for their claims indirectly. That is, they hold that the hypothesis of artistic creation viewed as expression of the artist's feelings gives us a more coherent theory of art, explains more of what we take to be the facts of art, than any other rival theory. They argue their claim by setting forth an analysis of the concept of expression of feeling, and then arguing that the facts about art are consistent with their analysis. In so doing, however, they analyze a concept which already has an ordinary use as it is applied to feeling, and they purport to be consistent with this use in their analysis. If their claims about expression of feeling are correct, it will follow that the ordinary use of "expression" as it applies to feelings and emotions will be specifically to creation of works of art. That is, anything other than the creation of works of art which has been called "expression of feeling" will be a misnomer. There is some doubt, however, if their analysis is valid, as I shall now argue.

---

[8] Collingwood, op. cit., p. 109.

One main problem for the Expression theorists is that of showing why their definition of expression is not narrowly stipulative, for it would appear to be the case that there are cases of expression which have nothing to do with the creation of art works. The explanation for the narrowness of their definition is that it results from considering only examples of cases of people behaving emotionally where such behavior is betraying or evincing emotion, and not considering any other cases which are typically called "expressing emotion." This will not do, because not every case in which people behave emotionally meets the conditions of giving vent to, betraying, or evincing emotion, as I shall now argue.

Consider as an example the case most frequently cited by the Expressionists, that of anger. There certainly are times when a person may lose control of himself, be in a blind fury, where his actions are not done intentionally. But, on the other hand, if he quite deliberately rises from his chair, pounds the desk in front of him, and yells that someone was unfairly treated, for example, why must we refrain from calling this a case of expression of anger? It is intentional and deliberate, and, therefore, meets one of the conditions necessary for expression on the Expressionist's own account. Furthermore, it is the case that such behavior is called "expression," so that there is no stipulation in using the word here to describe this case and the many cases like it.

Furthermore, less intense feelings are said to be expressed in cases like the above which have nothing to do with artistic creation. For example, a person may express his enthusiasm for a party by smiling and affirming in a certain tone of voice, "What a magnificent evening!" A person may express his feeling of triumph by holding up his thumbs. These cases are certainly called cases of expression of feelings, and we are entitled to an explanation from these theorists as to why it is improper to use this term here.

When the Expression theorists consider cases of people behaving emotionally they confine themselves to the involuntary evincing or betraying of emotion. Thus, they speak of stammering, turning pale, turning red, trembling, and so on, which are the natural accompaniments of emotion. In so doing they overlook the cases in which behavior is voluntary, intentional, and conventional. Emotion can be expressed by such conventional devices as smiling, cursing, gesturing in certain ways, even uttering, "You louse!" If these conventional means of expression are recognized, then it will not seem that the ordinary cases are involuntary and intentional.

Yet, it will be said that I have failed to mention the other condition of expression, viz., clarification of emotion. There is no argument, however, that would show why this is a necessary condition of expression. Rather, it is simply asserted that genuine cases of expression differ from evincing and betraying feeling in respect of clarifying the emotion and doing something deliberately. Yet, we do not need to require clarification for the requisite distinction if expression is voluntary and intentional. We can agree that it is sometimes true that expression of one's feelings has this clarificatory aspect to it, just as writing down one's thoughts on a given subject often serves to clarify them for oneself. But, in a case where someone is angry, where he knows what is responsible for his feeling, and is presently about to take up the issue with someone else, must we refrain from calling his subsequent activity a true expression on the grounds that he knew what his feelings were before he sought to express them? I can see no reason for imposing this condition on cases of expression other than attempting to use it to distinguish expression from betraying and evincing, a distinction which can be made in a different way, as I have indicated.

I want to turn now to considering a further condition of expression maintained by these theorists which is equally problematic. They claim that in all cases where it is legitimate to speak of someone expressing his feelings, the person in question must presently have the feeling which is expressed. If a person expresses his anger at something, then he must be angry. If he expresses his fear, then he must be afraid. If he does not presently have these feelings, then he is only pretending to express, and not really expressing at all. We can agree that this condition, realized and accepted by the advocates of the Expression theory, is a condition of expression, but it leads to consequences which are paradoxical if art is held to be the expression of emotion. Consider the case of the creation of a musical composition in which the composer wishes to express despair. This theory requires that the composer must be in a state of despair at the time of its composition. Generally, it requires that the composer must be in the emotional state that his work expresses in order for his work to be an expression of it. This, however, is too much to ask us to believe. How could a composer work under such circumstances? What do we do with the assertions of composers such as Igor Stravinsky and Paul Hindemith who testify that they work many times cooly and dispassionately? It is far more certain that these men are composers, than that the account of musical composition in terms of expression is true. Furthermore, there are some pieces of music that are known to be written under circumstances in which the composer was in a depressed state of mind, e.g. Mozart's last symphonies. If Mozart was depressed throughout the composition of these works, then how are we to account for the expressive character of the _Thirty-ninth Symphony_ which is characterized by critics as radiant and sunny? If Mozart was in a depressed state during the time of composition, it would appear to be impossible that this work has the character it does.

I have argued that there are reasons for thinking the account of artistic creation given by the Expression theorists to be mistaken, that it is far from obvious that what the artist does in the activity of creation can properly be referred to as "expressing his feelings." If this is so, then it is not nearly so simply and obviously true as the

Expressionists thought that the composer expresses his feelings when he composes a musical composition. It may still be true, of course, that the process of creating the musical work does sometimes bear some relation to feeling, but it should not be accepted that the composer is always expressing his feelings during this process.

I want to turn now to a further point about the Expression theory. As we have seen, these theorists argue that in the process of creation the artist expresses his feelings, and, in virtue of this, the work is correctly thought of as the expression of his feelings. Thus, if the composer expresses a feeling of sadness in creating a work, the work itself is the expression of this sadness. As Dewey has remarked, there is an organic connection between process and product. Yet, although this point about a necessary connection between the act of creation and the created entity has been assumed, it is founded on a mistake. The mistake is in assuming that it follows from a process having a certain property (expressing sadness, for example), that the created product has that property. This can easily be shown to be an invalid inference, however. For example, the process of artistic creation is lacking in weight, but the created work may have weight. The creative process of a musical work may have taken ten years, but it is nonsense to say that the work itself takes ten years. Even if it were true that the work expressed the feeling of the artist on every occasion where the work was prompted by the desire to express a feeling, this would be no more than a simple matter of fact rather than a genetic connection.

This failure to distinguish between properties of the process and the product is what accounts for the failure of most of these theorists to explain how it would be possible for music to express the feelings of the composer. If it is simply assumed that the composer expresses his feelings in the composition of the work, and that the product will have the property of the process, then one does not need to argue that music can function to communicate the composer's feelings. Yet, if this inference from property of process to product is invalid, then it must be independently argued that music in capable of making the composer's feelings known to others.

I suspect, however, that an advocate of the Expressionist viewpoint about music and feeling will not be persuaded by these points. "It may be so," he will say, "that the process of creation is not like expression of feeling in the ordinary cases you have cited, and that the product need not have the properties of the process. Yet, could it not still be the case that music is the expression of feeling in a different sense, the sense of symbolically representing it. Suppose we think of the composer not as expressing his feelings, in the ordinary senses of this claim, but as expressing his feelings symbolically in such a way that others can be aware of them. Isn't this at least consistent with the fact that music is described in terms of feeling? Granted that music has not been shown to be capable of this symbolic use, but it is at least possible that it could be established that it could function in this manner. Haven't composers gone on record as describing their activity as intentionally recording their feelings and moods in their music? For example, Beethoven once said that the *Pastoral Symphony* did not represent birds, flowers, and streams, but *his feelings* when he encountered them on walks through the woods.[9] What he did, perhaps, was organize the elements of music in such a way that others could become acquainted with his feelings. The activity of musical composition and musical understanding may very well bear a close resemblance to speaking and understanding a language since the possibility of communication seems to be a feature of both."

I think this reply shows, if nothing else, that there is more to the Expressionist viewpoint about music than we have considered so far. This position would modify some of the traditional Expression Theory in a way that would render it more plausible. Thus, it would not be required that the composer be presently experiencing the feeling for him to represent it symbolically. But, some of the traditional claims made about creation could, on this modified version, be preserved. The intentional and deliberate aspect of creation could still be insisted upon, and, furthermore, the condition of clarification of emotion is at least consistent with this reformulation.

---

[9] Sir Donald Tovey, *The Forms of Music* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 169.

In the following two chapters I shall consider the claims that music is a means whereby feeling could be symbolically represented by a composer. The main burden of this modified version of the Expression Theory will be to show that music meets the conditions of a symbol system or language. Thus, it must be shown that music is a system of elements that could be arranged in such a way that listeners could understand what feeling the composer had intended to express. That is, it must be shown how music is a system of elements capable of communicating the composer's feelings to us. Furthermore, given that music is such a symbolism, we also should be shown what is of importance about this mode of communicating feelings. Thus, given that a composer wishes to communicate his feelings to others, why should he select music over any other means to do so? Let us now turn to a consideration of the first attempt to answer these questions, the theory of Suzanne Langer.

CHAPTER TWO

MUSIC AS A PRESENTATIONAL SYMBOL OF FEELING: SUZANNE LANGER'S THEORY

In this chapter I shall discuss the theory of Suzanne Langer that music is a symbol of feeling. Langer explicitly rejects the arguments of the traditional Expression theorists who had based their position on an analysis of the creative act, arguing instead that music is a symbolic expression of feeling whereby the composer can communicate what he knows about feeling to others. Most of her theoretical discussion is concerned not with the creative process but with the resulting product in that her main concern is to show that the created musical work bears the features of symbolism.

There are many philosophers who have been attracted to the position that absolute music is symbolic in some way. For example, Charles Norris has maintained that music is an iconic sign of value properties. Again, L. A. Reid has maintained that music functions as an "embodiment symbol," a concept that is identical in meaning with Langer's "presentational symbol,"[1] I have chosen to present only Langer's position for two reasons. First, her position has had the most influence in aesthetics. Langer has been mentioned in later books which offer positions on the aesthetics of music, and, in particular, Reid's later work is derivative from hers. Secondly, Langer's work is broadly argued and involves a large number of assumptions made about language and mind that are to a large extent shared by others attracted to her position about music, thereby making her suitably representative. Finally, I should add that there is at present no single general discussion of her position that is now universally accepted as accurate. This has prompted Harold Osborne to describe her theory as one that "has been received with respect rather than clear understanding."[2] It is the purpose of this chapter to provide a discussion that will promote a clear understanding of her position.

---

[1] See the bibliography for the relevant works by Morris and Reid.

1) Langer's Theory of Music.

Langer's theory of music is influenced by what I shall call the "Romantic view of music." She quotes with approval Richard Wagner who states that:

> What music expresses is . . . not the passion, love, or longing of such-and-such an occasion, but passion, love or longing in itself, and this it presents in that unlimited variety of motivations, which is the exclusive and

---

[2] Harold Osborne, "Introduction," from Aesthetics, edited by H. Osborne (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 19.

> particular characteristic of music, foreign and inexpressible to any other language.[3]

She finds support for this doctrine in the writings of other Romantic composers as well, citing Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt and Hector Berlioz. Accordingly, the hypothesis that she wishes to provide theoretical support for is that music is a symbolic representation of feeling, and not a mere undisciplined giving vent to one's feelings. The composer by means of this symbolic representation can then convey his knowledge of feelings to others. According to this view, the function of music is to communicate states of feeling to the listener which could not be communicated in ordinary language. Music functions to express the ineffable, and its meaning, therefore, transcends the bounds of expression in language. The value of music on this hypothesis consists in its capacity to reveal to others the feelings that the composer has experienced, thereby enlarging and enriching the lives of those who hear it with full understanding. Such a theory is obviously ambitious and requires a good deal of argument to make plausible. In order to understand her argument that music is a symbol of feeling, we must briefly examine her general theory of symbolism.

The most obvious case of a symbolism is language, and the question that any theory of symbols must provide an answer to is how language has meaning. Langer attempts to answer this question in the following way. She holds that the basic element of meaning is the descriptive statement, or "proposition," and that the words in such statements function as names for elements in a possible state of affairs which the statement may represent.

---

[3] Suzanne Langer, Philosophy in New Key (New York: The New American Library, 1951), p. 188.

> It has become apparent that a proposition fits a fact not only because it contains names for the things and actions involved in the fact, but also because it combines them in a pattern analogous, somehow, to the pattern in which the named objects are "in fact" combined. *A proposition is a picture of a structure--the structure of a state of affairs.*[4]

Thus, statements such as, "Caesar was stabbed by Brutus," have meaning in virtue of their elements, i.e. individual words, functioning as names and standing in relation to one another in a manner which exhibits the same relation that the elements of the states of affairs have to one another. It is this relational identity that she refers to as "identity of structure," and which is sometimes called "structural isomorphism."

That Langer uses the word "somehow" in the above quotation is significant, because what she is affirming here is not at all obviously so. It is, indeed, more puzzling than enlightening to say that linguistic meaning is made possible by an identity of structure between proposition and fact, and Langer does very little to make this doctrine more plausible. She suggests, but does not argue, that identity of structure between proposition and fact is preserved by means of a projection, analogous to the Mercator projection, which preserves the same relations of the Earth on a flattened surface. She calls this projection the "discursive projection," but she nowhere specifies what the projection is. Her lack of positive argument is due to simply assuming that the doctrine of meaning put forward by Ludwig Wittgenstein in the _Tractatus_ is fully adequate.

---

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

> The logical theory on which this whole study of symbols is based on is essentially that which was set forth by Wittgenstein, some twenty years ago, in his _Tractatus_: _Logico_ _Philosophicus_. . . .[5]

That she does assume the adequacy of this doctrine as a starting point for her own symbolic investigations is revealed by her statement that:

> There is no need of going farther into the details of verbal symbolism and its poorer substitutes. . . . The subject has been exhaustively treated by several able men, . . . I can only assent to their findings.[6]

This assumption is important to an understanding of what she regards as her own contribution to symbolic theory, viz. her theory of presentational symbolism. Let us now note, however, one more important assumption that Langer makes relevant to her theory of presentational symbols.

In assuming the adequacy of this theory of symbolism, Langer goes on to accept the interpretation of this theory put forward by Rudolf Carnap. Thus, she assumes that the facts, or states of affairs, of which meaningful propositions share the structure, are publicly observable. She accepts the Positivist doctrine that a statement in language is meaningful if and only if it is publicly verifiable. Yet, she does not accept the resulting behavioristic implication for the philosophy of mind, which is that if any statement about mental phenomena is meaningful, it must be publicly verifiable, which makes mental phenomena either forever unknowable, or implies some form of behaviorism. Indeed, she wishes to preserve the traditional notion of mind as an internal private realm of "subjective" experience, and argue for the existence of a new kind of symbolism which is unique to this realm and which can yield knowledge of it. Langer holds, therefore, that language cannot state facts about feelings, urging in partial support of this the difficulty of describing certain feelings we may have to others, and wishes to argue the hypothesis that there exists another kind of symbolism that can, viz. presentational symbolism. Ultimately, she will argue that music is a presentational symbol of feeling. We must now determine what presentational symbols are.

---

[5] _Ibid._, p. 75.

[6] _Ibid._, p. 77.

Langer defines the notion of a presentational symbol by means of consideration of what she regards as a paradigm case of such a symbol:

> Now consider the most familiar sort of non-discursive symbol, a picture. Like language,

> it is composed of elements that represent various respective constituents in the object; but these elements are not units with independent meanings. The areas of light and shade that constitute . . . a photograph . . . have no significance by themselves. . . . Yet they are faithful representatives of usual elements composing the usual object. . . . The "elements" that the camera represents are not the "elements" that language represents. They are a thousand times more numerous. For this reason the correspondence between a word picture and a visible object can never be as close as that between the object and its photograph.[7]

She holds that a photograph is a symbol in virtue of the common feature it has with language. A photograph has the same relation to a state of affairs as a true proposition: it exhibits the structure of the state of affairs which it depicts. The difference between language, or discursive symbolism, and presentational symbolism is that the latter presents its meaning directly, i.e. without the aid of a "projection" like that involved in language, or the Mercator projection map. The term "presentational," then refers to the manner in which something is represented symbolically. Based on her position that a photograph is a symbol, she lists three characteristics of presentational symbolism. First, presentational symbols have no vocabulary, they have no elements with relatively fixed meanings, as words in a language. Presentational symbols, therefore, do not constitute a language. Secondly, presentational symbols cannot be defined in terms of each other, each having its own unique meaning. Thirdly, the elements of discursive symbolism, words, are general in that they admit of application to many things of a single type. Presentational symbols are different in that their reference is to a particular state of affairs.

---

[7] Ibid., pp. 87-8.

> In the non-discursive mode that speaks directly to sense, however, there is no intrinsic generality. It is first and foremost a direct presentation of an individual object.[8]

She uses the word "articulate" to refer to this capacity of symbolic presentation of a state of affairs. Presentational symbols articulate what they are symbolic of.

Let us note the following here. If we grant that a photograph is a symbol, we must realize that Langer has still a considerable distance to go to establish her main thesis. Specifically, she has given us only one example of a presentational symbol, and this example obviously does not go far at all to support the thesis that there are presentational symbols which picture the private realm of feeling. Quite obviously, a photograph is a picture of a publicly observable state of affairs, and even if we grant Langer's claims about the photograph being a presentational symbol, we have yet to see if there is any reason at all to believe there are other presentational symbols, and if these symbols are suitable for "picturing" what she refers to as the "inner life of feeling." Langer attempts to meet this challenge by showing that there is at least one example of presentational symbolism par excellance, namely music. Let us now see how she attempts to argue that her general theory applies to the case of music.

---

[8] Ibid., p. 89.

It is essential to understand that Langer assumes that music has meaning, that musical forms are symbolic forms. She would hold that this assumption is just as reasonable to make as the assumption that, "the cat is on the mat," has meaning. Like Wittgenstein she starts with an assumption that she regards as obviously true, and then asks the question of how it could be possible that it is true. Her answer to this question in regard to music is to show that musical meaning is made possible in virtue of music having the features of presentational symbolism. Thus, she regards her contribution to musical aesthetics as that of showing the peculiar kind of symbolic meaning that music has. Accordingly, Langer argues that music is a presentational symbol of feeling by attempting to show first that music exhibits relational structure identical to that of feeling, and, secondly, that music displays the features of presentational symbolism as she has defined it.

First, that music exhibits a relational structure identical to that of feeling she regards as well established. Thus, "that musical structures logically resemble certain dynamic patterns of human experience is a well established fact."[9] The evidence she cites for this is largely based on music being described in terms of feeling and emotion words. Thus, she holds that music exhibits patterns of motion and rest, of tension and release, agreement and disagreement, fulfillment, excitation, sudden change, etc.,[10] on the grounds that people describe music using these terms and that such descriptions indicate the perception of relational structure between music and human feeling.

Secondly, Langer wishes to argue that the perception of symbolic meaning in music, which she has related to feeling, is to be accounted for by her theory of presentational symbolism. To show this she argues that music exhibits the features of presentational symbolism. The elements of music as a presentational symbol would be tones of a specific pitch and timbre. These elements have no fixed meaning but can be combined in such a way that they do have meaning in virtue of bearing a resemblance to feeling. Furthermore, and consistent with her doctrine, there is no dictionary for the elements of music. Thirdly, music does not have meaning in virtue of a projection in the manner of discursive symbolism, but its meaning is perceived directly by recognizing the identity of structure between music and feeling. Thus, she alleges, all three characteristics of presentational symbolism are found in music.

---

[9] Ibid., p. 192.

[10] Ibid., p. 193.

Once she has reached this point, the remainder of her argument follows quickly. If music is a presentational symbol of feeling, thereby having the structure of a feeling state, it has the structure of a state of affairs, and, consequently, it can convey information about feeling to others. Thus, the value of music is that it is used by the composer to communicate to others what he knows about feeling, and those of us who perceive his music correctly will be enlightened as to the nature of feeling. In this respect, Langer's claims are even more ambitious than those of the Romantics which she seeks to justify. What we know, of course, cannot be restated in ordinary language: not only are states of feeling ineffable, but knowledge of feeling is so as well.

Thus, her final conclusion is that the Romantic theory of music does admit of justification via the concept of presentational symbolism and her attendant assumptions about language and feeling. In what follows I shall offer a critical discussion of her theory in the order in which I have presented it. First, I shall discuss her assumptions about language and feeling, and then go on to discuss her theory of presentational symbolism as it applies to music.

2) Criticism of Langer's Assumptions about Symbolism.

The main assumption that Langer makes about symbols in her theory is that symbols have meaning in virtue of their elements being combined in such a way as to exhibit the same relations as the facts or states of affairs to which they refer. Although she writes as if this is a well established assumption, it is not the case that this is so. In fact, the originator of this doctrine, Wittgenstein, repudiated it.[11] As early as 1931, there were other philosophers who did not accept this position about symbolism:

> I cannot myself credit what seems to be the doctrine of Wittgenstein . . . that what makes an expression formally proper to a fact is some real and non-conventional one-one picturing relation between the composition of the expression and that of the fact.[12]

Thus, Langer's assumption that the doctrine of meaning put forth in the Tractatus was accepted as correct and beyond argument is incorrect. I shall indicate some of the reasons why this was thought to be so.

One problem with the theory of structure as Langer interprets it is in seeing how the alleged relational similarity between proposition and state of affairs holds in any but a few carefully chosen examples. Thus, suppose one were to write, "The lamp is to the left of the chair," and, as a matter of fact, it is true that these objects are so related. In this particular case the words of the written statement are related in the same way as the objects referred to. The words "the lamp" appear in the written sentence to the left of the words "the chair." But a case like this is certainly the exception rather than the rule. Suppose someone asserts that it is raining, and as a matter of fact it is raining. How are we to correlate the assertion in this case with the state of affairs referred to? What elements in the state of affairs are related in the way that the words of the proposition are? Indeed, what *are* the elements in the state of affairs?

---

[11] See his Philosophical Investigations, secs. 35-65.

[12] Gilbert Ryle, "Systematically Misleading Expressions," reprinted in Logic and Language, edited by Anthony Flew (New York: Anchor Books, 1965), p. 37.

Langer would no doubt reply that the identity of structure she has in mind cannot be *seen* in examples such as these, but is preserved by means of a projection analogous to the Mercator projection. Yet, it is sufficient to reply to this move that although we do have an account of the Mercator projection, i.e. we can specify the rules which preserve identity of structure between the Mercator map and the Earth, Langer has not produced an analogous set of rules which would show how a relational identity exists between proposition and state of affairs. In fact, she merely *assumes* that such a projection *must* exist on the grounds that Wittgenstein's theory is correct but not obviously true.

Yet, Wittgenstein's theory is not indisputable. His theory was put forward in response to a question about the possibility of meaning in language. That is, given that propositions formulated in natural language do obviously have meaning, he asked for the conditions in virtue of which this could be so. Wittgenstein's answer was, as Langer says, that identity of structure between proposition and state of affairs must exist, but the propositions he had in mind were not those of ordinary language but those of an ideal language, based on the model of the symbolic language of Bertrand Russell's Principia Mathematica. When propositions of ordinary language were translated into such a language, he thought, the structure of the facts which they expressed would be shown.

Wittgenstein's doctrine was called into question on two main points which have bearing on Langer. First, there never was a specification of the proposed ideal language, so there was no way to prove the doctrine to be true. In this regard Langer's proposed projection is obviously no improvement. But, secondly, the argument that Wittgenstein presented, and Langer accepted, was invalid. Wittgenstein's theory would have been acceptable if identity of structure were the only way in which linguistic meaning could be explained. In fact, it is not the only explanation. Another explanation of linguistic meaning is that language is a form of rule-governed (or conventional) behavior. On this hypothesis, using and understanding a language amounts to learning a system of rules relating words to things, events, and states of affairs, as well as relating them (syntactically) to each other. A symbol, then, would acquire its meaning in virtue of the rules in force in a language community and its meaning would be a function of its use. This is true not only for words, but for other non-linguistic symbols as well. Such a hypothesis is more useful than the theory of structure because it is accessible to investigation whereas the theory of identity of structure is not.

Let us now turn to Langer's theory of presentational symbolism. According to Langer, a thing is a symbol in virtue of possessing an identity of relational structure with that which it symbolizes. Something is a presentational symbol if and only if, in virtue of an identity of relational structure, it can picture (show, exhibit) its meaning directly, without the aid of a "projection" (the Mercator Map). The question I wish to raise about her doctrine is whether she has shown that there are any presentational symbols. Langer holds that a familiar example of such a symbol is an ordinary photograph, and defines the concept of presentational symbolism in reference to this alleged paradigm. Yet, a photograph does not meet the condition of presentational symbolism, namely that of preserving identity of relation without a projection. A photograph depicts in two dimensions a three dimensional state of affairs, and cannot, therefore, preserve an identity of relation in virtue of lacking the relations of "in front of" and "in back of." A photograph is itself a projection in two dimensions of something that exists in three, and, consequently, cannot be a presentational symbol. Rather a photograph merely resembles that which it depicts.

Langer has failed in her attempt to give a convincing paradigm case of a presentational symbol. The question that arises now is whether there could be anything that fits her requirement for presentational symbolism. What we must have is something that is identical in relational structure to some other thing, where the identity in question permits identification of that which is symbolized without the aid of any conventional mechanism, or projection. Consider a state of affairs such as a cat sitting on a mat. A presentational symbol for this state of affairs would have to be three dimensional in order to meet the condition of identity of relational structure. Moreover, the elements of the symbol would have to exhibit the same relations as those of the symbolized state. It is logically possible to make a three dimensional replica of a cat on a mat, but there is considerable question if it is humanly possible to do so. If one whisker is awry in the model, then we do not have on Langer's view a presentational symbol, because we do not have a relational identity between symbol and thing symbolized. It is reasonable to question, therefore, whether or not there could in fact be anything which meets

Langer's criterion for presentational symbolism, and which could function effectively as such.

In any case, even if it were humanly possible to create presentational symbols, the requisite identity would not be sufficient to insure calling the replica a symbol of the state of affairs. It would be necessary to require that the replica be *taken as* a symbol of the state of affairs, that its use be that of standing for the state of affairs. If such a replica were simply presented to someone, he would not take it as a symbol of a state of affairs unless he were previously told to do so. But, in this case, we have a convention in operation, namely that what we present to him is to be taken as denoting that to which it is structurally identical, and, again, we do not have the condition of presentational symbolism met. For presentational symbolism shows directly without the aid of any convention what its meaning is.

Apart from this consideration, however, it must be conceded that it is difficult to argue positively that a photograph is not a symbol. In particular a photograph seems to bear a relation to what it depicts that is very much like the semantic relation of denotation. For instance, the definite description, "The author of Waverly," denotes one and only one thing, Sir Walter Scott, just as would a photograph of Scott. Yet, there is a difference between the case of symbolization. Let us recall some examples of typical symbols. In Renaissance painting, ships were frequently used as symbols of the church in virtue of having certain functional similarities to the church. Thus, they sheltered people from the dangers of life and carried them safely to their destination. Again, a road map contains certain symbols as does a schematic diagram. But, however, the church is not designated by just this one ship, but by any representation of a ship in the appropriate artistic context. That is, in each of these cases the symbols do not have the function of naming just one and only one particular thing as a definite description does or as would a photograph. In each of these cases we can speak of tokens of a given type, i.e. we can speak of a number of particular physical instances of a symbol. In the case of the photograph, however, this is not ordinarily so.[13] It is the lack of this distinction that does not permit a photograph to be used in the way that symbols are used.

Perhaps the difficulty of favorably comparing a photograph to a denoting expression, such as a definite description, is that such an expression denotes in virtue of the individual symbols, the words, being combined in accordance with a certain particular semantic convention involving the use of the word "the." Similarly, a schematic diagram functions to denote a particular radio in virtue of the individual symbols, (circles, straight lines, etc.) being arranged in a certain way. In the case of a photograph there are no conventional elements, and this may be what makes it odd to speak of the meaning of a photograph. Of course, one could speak of a schematic diagram as a symbol, or "the author of Waverly" as a symbol, but it should be made clear what the theoretical advantage of so doing is. Similarly, we could speak of the photograph as a symbol, even though it is not ordinarily so called, but there should be a theoretical advantage in so doing. Unless it is made clear what the advantage is, we are confronted with mere stipulation. At best, then, Langer's crucial assumption that a photograph is an example of a symbol is problematic and needs more argument to make it plausible. It is certainly not an obvious enough instance of a symbol to serve as a paradigm case in the presentation of a theory.

---

[13] Although it is easy to see that it could be so as when a number of copies of a photograph are made and come to be taken as symbolic of a certain state of affairs.

3) Criticism of Langer's assumptions about feeling and language.

So far in this critical discussion of Langer's theory I have discussed her specific assumptions about symbolism in order to examine her doctrine of presentational symbolism. I shall now turn to a discussion of some further assumptions she makes about language and feeling that have an indirect bearing on her doctrine of presentational symbols in that acceptance of them seems to make her doctrine appear much more reasonable than it actually is. In particular Langer assumes that feelings belong to a private internal realm of experience, the "inner world of feeling," as she calls it. A word such as "cheerful" functions to name a private mental state that a person can experience. But, she has also assumed that language, or "discursive symbolism," functions to state facts which are publicly observable. The consequence of these views is that language cannot state anything about feelings as they really are (i.e. as internal states) but can only state publicly observable symptoms thereof. Thus, the road is paved for the introduction of a previously undiscovered symbolism that can give us knowledge of feelings as they really are. However, there is little reason to accept these assumptions, and considerable reason to reject them as adequate to feeling and language.

Actually there is no reason _on Langer's own theory of meaning_ for accepting the position that language cannot communicate information about feelings, even as she thinks of them as internal and private. Langer accepted a theory of meaning which presupposes identity of structure with fact as a criterion of meaning. Acceptance of this theory does not _entail_ applicability of language only to the publicly observable. Thus, even if one accepts this theory, and, in addition, accepts the public-private external world-subjective world of feeling model, there is no reason to suppose that discursive symbolism could not be used to record the facts about the "internal world of feeling." Langer, however, simply overlooks this point, and accepts Carnap's interpretation of Wittgenstein's theory.

The closest Langer comes to providing a positive argument to support her assumption about the discursive ineffability of feeling-states is the following.

> Everybody knows that language is a very poor medium for expressing our emotional nature. It merely names certain vaguely and crudely conceived states, but fails miserably in any attempt to convey the ever-moving patterns, the ambivalences and intricacies of inner experience, the interplay of feelings with thoughts and impressions. . . .[14]

Let us overlook that there is an obvious difference between affirming that language is a poor means for communicating feeling and that language cannot communicate feeling, and that it is this latter position which she should be affirming here. Her argument relies on her assumption that the elements of discursive symbolism, words, function as general names of things. Notice, however, that the objection that she raises on behalf of names for feelings and emotions holds just as well for any object whatsoever, public or private. Thus, one could say just as well that language is a very poor medium for communicating information about cats on the grounds that the general words of language fail miserably to convey the ever-changing pattern, the ambivalences and intricacies of "catness." No matter how hard one tries one just cannot say what a cat really is like! Clearly something has gone wrong here.

---

[14] Langer, op. cit., p. 92.

Perhaps, however, she is also thinking of the case in which we try to describe our feelings about something to someone, and then give up, saying something such as, "I just can't tell you how I was affected." It is certainly true that such situations occur, but they not only occur in the case of one's feelings, but in the case of publicly observable objects as well. Thus, I might say just as well, "I just can't describe my antique table in such a way that really does it justice. You must see it for yourself!" Notice that in this case the point is that no matter how hard I try in formulating a description of the table, I simply cannot supply you, by means of such a description, with the experience of the table. Although I can convey to you that it is breath-takingly beautiful, in so doing I do not supply you with the experience of the thing which is breath-takingly beautiful. That language is limited in this respect should surprise no one. Similarly, in the case of feelings, although I can describe the way I feel to someone, I need not by means of that description, recreate the feeling in him in order to communicate. If I tell you that I am cheerful, slightly ebullient, and at the same time just a bit melancholy, I convey to you how I am feeling.

It is no objection for Langer to claim in this case that one really does not know because the description was not exact enough. For on this objection nothing would count as communication on her view short of duplicating the experience in the person. We have no recourse but to point out that the measure of exactness she would insist upon would make every fact ultimately ineffable, and would make it impossible to communicate anything to anyone. I take it, however, that this consequence is a simple *reductio* of her position, and even something that she would wish to deny in the case of the capacity of discursive symbolism conveying information about the public world.

It is true that feeling-states are sometimes (not always) difficult to describe. One does have to have recourse to figure of speech (metaphor, similie, etc.), to communicate linguistically. There are tough cases, of course, and cases in which we may doubt that we have succeeded in conveying our feelings to others. But this does not show that it is impossible ever to communicate, only that it is difficult on some occasions.

If one rejects the assumption that feelings are ineffable mental states, then the argument for presentational symbolism is considerably weakened. For there is no need to introduce a new previously undiscovered symbolism to explain how we come to have knowledge of feeling. We come to have knowledge of feeling by watching how people react in certain sorts of situations, by being in these situations ourselves, and by discussion with others (using "discursive" symbolism). Thus, even if music could give us knowledge of feeling, this is not the only way we could obtain it, and if this is so, notice that the alleged cognitive value of music is not a value that it alone possesses. The need for a new symbolism to give us knowledge of feeling is simply bogus.

One final assumption that Langer makes about language should be discussed. Following Carnap, Langer assumes that language is meaningful if and only if it can be correlated with publicly observable states of affairs. The only legitimate function of language, or "discursive symbolism," on this view, is that of describing the publicly observable world. It is not at all surprising that she should feel that discursive symbolism is rather limited as a result of her acceptance of this position. It is her acceptance of this position that leads her to make the claims she does about feelings being discursively ineffable. Of course, if one assumes that language functions to make assertions about a publicly observable world, and in addition one goes on to assume that feelings are not publicly verifiable, then one creates a logical hiatus between the public world of objects and a private world of feeling. Feelings will then seem to be mysterious components of an "inner world," inaccessible to being described by language. I have already argued against her notions about feelings, but something also should be briefly said about her essentially Positivist theory of language.

The notion that verification is a condition for linguistic meaning is simply too narrow to account for the meaning of sentence forms other than assertions. "Where is John?", "Please pass the salt," and "What a splendid performance!", have meaning, but there is no state of affairs that one can appeal to in order to verify them. The limited theory of meaning Langer accepts is plausible only for simple cases of assertion such as, "The dog is chasing the cat," where one can appeal to a state of affairs that would verify the assertion. It is absurd to think that we should reject all other sentences as meaningless because they do not perform the function of stating the publicly verifiable.

Furthermore, it is not the case that language has only one valid function, the descriptive function. It is now a commonplace that language is used for a variety of purposes, describing the features of a publicly observable world being only one such purpose. We inform, persuade, perform, direct, and express our feelings by means of language. Language is a much more flexible instrument than Langer is willing to allow. It is by suggesting that the function of language is confined to reporting that makes one think of it as so limited, and that makes the hypothesis of presentational symbolism, a symbolism that can do what language cannot do, appear reasonable. But if language is not limited to reporting, and feelings are not essentially internal, then language can do what presentational symbolism is allegedly needed for. If one can express and communicate one's feelings to others by using language, then there is no need for the introduction of a special symbolism to make up for what language cannot do.

The preceding objections against Langer's conceptions of language and feeling suggest that her theory of presentational symbolism is based on a number of false assumptions. As a result, her general theory is considerably weakened, if not refuted. Yet, these objections do not show that music is not a presentational symbol. That is, even if Langer has made a number of incorrect assumptions about the nature of language and feeling, she still may be correct in thinking that music is a presentational symbol that can communicate knowledge of feeling. Music would not have the epistemic importance that she attributes to it, but it still could function as a symbolic means for the expression of feeling. I shall now turn to an examination of this specific claim.

4) Criticism of Langer's Theory of Music as a Presentational Symbol.

Langer argues that music is a presentational symbol on the grounds that music does have symbolic meaning, and that this can be explained by showing that music exhibits the features of presentational symbolism as she has characterized it. Yet, how does she know that musical meaning is symbolic in nature? Unfortunately, for her argument, she reaches this position by means of an obvious equivocation on "significance." There is a shift when she states, "if (artistic) forms in and of themselves are significant, . . . then certainly the kind of significance that belongs to them constitutes a very special problem in semantics."[15] The considerations that she brings to show that artistic forms are significant, however, show them to be significant in an evaluative sense. It is obvious that musical forms are significant in the sense that (at least some of them) are valuable, but one cannot go on from this to infer that their significance must be symbolic, and that it is a special problem in semantics. We can notice the same shift from the proposition that music is meaningful to the proposition that music has symbolic meaning. It is true that music is meaningful (i.e. presents one with a valuable experience), but it remains to be shown that music is a symbol, or functions as a language.[16]

Her argument that music is a presentational symbol of feeling is considerably weakened by this shift. For now the only reason we have for thinking music to be a symbol is that is possesses some of the features that presentational symbols exhibit. But, if it is not clear that there are any presentational symbols in the first place, and she simply assumes rather than argues that a photograph actually is such a symbol, then her argument for the case of music is weakened still further. For, even if music does possess the features of presentational symbolism, then this will not be sufficient to show that music actually is such a symbol if the entire notion of presentational symbolism is dubious.

---

[15] Langer, op. cit., p. 176.

[16] Cf. New Key, pp. 174-6.

However, let us be generous and simply waive this issue for the purpose of further discussion of her doctrine. Let us simply assume that it can be made out that a photograph is a symbol, that it denotes what it depicts. Even so, Langer still has some difficulties with her position that music is a presentational symbol of feeling. For she must show that musical compositions exhibit an identity of relational structure to states of feeling. Thus, in maintaining that a photograph is a symbol, she speaks of "elements that represent various constituents in the object."[17] This implies that that which is symbolized consists of a combination of elements, for the symbol represents "various constituents in the object." Therefore, for music to be a symbol of feeling it must be the case that its elements (tones of certain pitch and timbre) be related in the same way as the elements of the feeling represented, or symbolized.

---

[17] Ibid., p. 87.

There is a difficulty here in that Langer has assumed that feelings are completely internal mental states, yet it is certainly not obvious that such states have elements. What evidence is there that such elements do exist? There is nothing we could appeal to in what we ordinarily say to indicate this. People do not speak of emotional elements when they describe their feeling states.

That feelings have elements is a crucial part of her position. For we must be able to identify the elements that the symbol represents in order to know its meaning. Ultimately, to justify the claim that a piece of music symbolizes one emotion rather than another, we must be able to point to an identity of relational pattern between music and feeling. Yet, what could we point to to prove the alleged identity? The most that she does to argue the point that such elements exist is point out that music is described in terms of feelings and emotions. This, however, is far from sufficient since this can be accounted for by other theories that do not presuppose the existence of purely mental elements. Indeed, Langer's notion that feelings have elements is not a basic datum of her theory (as it should be to sustain her argument), it is a consequence of her theory. This suggests even further that her theory needs reconsideration.

Suppose, then, that we alter her theory to avoid the aforementioned objection about feelings. In particular, suppose we require that music exhibit an identity of relation not with feelings _qua_ internal states, but with feelings taken as patterns of response in a physical sense that would include behavior. Even here we run into difficulty if we suppose the existence of elements which would explain the proposed identity. Thus, it is odd to think of sadness and cheer, for example, as differentiated from one another in virtue of a difference of a combination of elements.

As a result, one is inclined to alter her theory even further and require only that music and feeling resemble one another. Yet, although this move makes her doctrine consistent with that of Carrol C. Pratt, O. K. Bowsma and others who have written on the relation of music to feeling, it effectively precludes for Langer the possibility of showing that music is symbolic. For, her argument depends on establishing that music exhibits the features of presentational symbolism, and these features presuppose the existence of elements which exhibit an identity of relation with what the symbol represents. If Langer settles for resemblance, she will not have a sufficient condition for symbolization on her own theory of symbolism. Thus, even on the assumption that a photograph is a symbol, her theory that music is a symbol is beset by difficulties.

Something should be said in addition about her position that music expresses the composer's knowledge of human feeling. In making this claim she is relying on her argument that music is a symbol, and on the assumption that the function of symbols is to "formulate" experience and yield knowledge. Although Langer considers this to be an important consequence of her doctrine, and considers her theory to be a plausible defense of Benedetto Croce's claim that art can yield knowledge, she does not say enough about this to make it reasonable. In claiming that music yields knowledge of feeling, she is claiming that music can be known to be either true or false, and this implies that music has reference to feeling in the same way that a simple descriptive statement is about its object of reference. Just as we determine the truth of such a statement by making the relevant observations, so we should have some kind of procedure for determining the truth of music. Langer's only answer for such a procedure is that musical truth is known by intuition;[18] and, unfortunately for her theory, she does not analyze this concept sufficiently to enable us to know what she means. This aspect of Langer's theory is obviously highly important for her, but it has remained curiously undeveloped in her writing.

Moreover, this doctrine is at least paradoxical when it is taken as an account of "expression" in its ordinary use in critical discussions. For in claiming music to be a symbol of feeling, she is claiming that music refers to feeling. Yet, it is far-fetched to claim that this is what is meant when it is claimed that Mahler's *Sixth Symphony* expresses a tragic feeling, for example. In making this claim, one would not be taken to be saying that Mahler was referring to a tragic feeling by means of music, so that if Langer's theory is taken to be an analysis of "expression" as it actually is used it is mistaken. Her theory in fact requires us to stipulate a meaning for "expression." Langer appears to recognize this implication of her theory, for she states in a later work that music

---

[18] Suzanne Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 375.

> does not stand for something else, nor does it refer to anything that exists apart from it.[19]

In making such a statement she would appear to be giving up the concept of symbol in her theory, but a few lines further she is referring once again to works of art as symbols. Langer may, of course, wish to change her theory, but she cannot have it both ways. She cannot logically claim music to be symbolic of feeling and yet go on to deny that it has reference to anything at all.

5) *Conclusion*.

In this chapter I have discussed Langer's theory that music has meaning in virtue of being a symbol of feeling.

---

[19] Suzanne Langer, *Problems of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 132.

I have sought to show that she fails to establish this theory and fails to provide an acceptable position on musical meaning. Langer is certainly correct, however, in thinking that expression is a crucial concept in musical aesthetics, one that needs explaining rather than explaining away in the manner of Formalist aesthetics. In the next chapter, I shall discuss another theory of musical meaning that addresses itself to the problem of musical expression, the theory that music is a language of feeling.

CHAPTER THREE

MUSIC AS LANGUAGE OF FEELING

In this chapter I shall turn from a consideration of the theory of Langer that music is a symbol of feeling to the claim that music is a language of feeling. That music is in some sense a language of feeling was maintained by the traditional Expression theorists considered in Chapter One of this essay although they did very little to provide positive argument for this position about music. It has also been maintained by other theorists of art generally, and music in particular, and has recently been restated and argued by the critic-composer Deryck Cooke. Generally, the position that these writers have sought to establish is that music is a kind of language used by composers which can communicate their affective experience to others. I shall set forth the basic attributes of this theory by discussing its implications for creativity, the musical product, musical experience, and the value of music.

There is a commonality of agreement among these theorists that the nature and function of artworks involves the expression and communication of feeling to others, but the way in which artworks express feeling, the character of the experience of these works, and the value of the experience varies from writer to writer. It is not possible, therefore, to speak of one single theory that music is a language of feeling, for there have been many statements of this theory that differ on various points about musical experience and value. I shall select for the purpose of discussion one main advocate of this position, Deryck Cooke, for two reasons. First, he has set forth a version of this theory specifically for the case of music, and has provided a detailed account of how music functions as a language of feeling. In this respect he differs from other theorists who hold this position by implication from general theories of art. For example, C. J. Ducasse, whom I shall discuss more briefly, holds that art is the language of the emotions, but one will look in vain in his writing for a detailed discussion of how music functions as such. Secondly, the position put forth by Cooke shares many features of other theories which make this claim for music, as well as art generally, and is representative. The position argued is basically the same as that of Sullivan mentioned above, and has affinities to the position of Ducasse for art generally, and I. A. Richards for literature. I shall bring out the assumptions latent in this position. My aim is to show that there are so many difficulties with it that it is no longer capable of being defended.

1) Music as the Language of Feeling.

The theory that music is a language of feeling capable of conveying the affective experience of the composer is a position about the nature of music. Quite naturally those who have been attracted to this theory have also made specific claims about the process of musical creation. If music is essentially a language, it should be the case that composers know this and in the activity of musical creation use it as such. Some of the theorists hold that musical creation is an activity whereby the composer works under the influence of strong feeling and the compositional process is clarificatory in character. I have discussed and criticized this position in Chapter One and shall not repeat my discussion here. Others, however, hold that the feeling expressed is recollected in tranquility, so to speak, and represented symbolically for our apprehension. For example, in his discussion of creativity Deryck Cooke affirms that

> One of the emotions aroused in Beethoven by the heroic, libertarian ideal was, as we know, a deep grief for the unhappy fate that awaited many and many a liberator--that of annihilation. Wherefore he must have felt the compulsion to express this feeling in his symphony. . . .[1]

This does not imply that Beethoven was grief stricken during composition, but that his intent was to record symbolically by means of music this particular feeling. This position on creation is also held by C. J. Ducasse, who holds that art generally, and music in particular, is a language of feeling, and maintains that art is "conscious or critically controlled, objectification of self; or, equivalently, is consciously objective self-expression."[2] It is this position about creation as deliberate symbolic representation of feeling that will be examined in this chapter.

---

[1] Deryck Cooke, The Language of Music (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 17.

Notice that holding that musical creation is symbolic self-expression of feeling does not entail that the composer intends to produce knowledge of his feelings in listeners. That is, we are not confronted with a theory that makes communication a necessary condition of something being deemed musical art.[3] Communication between artist and spectator can occur, however, when the spectator listens to the work and detects the feeling the artist has expressed. Communication occurs, on this theory, when the listener finds out or determines what the composer expressed, and is like the situation of finding out what a person expressed even though he had no intention to produce an effect in others with his expression.

The advocates of this theory hold that it is the nature of music to be a language of feeling by which the composer can convey his affective experience to others. Since this is a claim about the essence of music it must be shown that the phrase "language of feeling" defines music, and distinguishes it from other products. In particular, it must be shown how music as a language differs from other natural languages such as ordinary English. The theory in question holds that the relevant difference resides in the manner in which emotion is communicated from composer to listener. Whereas ordinary language functions to make us aware of events by means of statements in words, music functions to produce affective states in us directly.

---

[2] Ducasse, op. cit., p. 111.

[3] cf. Leo Tolstoy, op. cit.

> The true expressive difference between the arts is that painting conveys feeling through a visual image, and literature through a rationally intelligible statement, but music conveys the naked feeling direct. As the composer felt, so we may hear, and feel: what he saw or thought, does not interfere.[4]

That is, music functions as a medium of communication in virtue of being capable of being used by a composer to cause us to experience affective states which he has experienced. In this case his experiences are not described to us but evoked in us in the process of musical experience. A claim common to all the theorists is that language functions to distort the subtlties of human experience in communication, and it is the unique capacity of the arts that it does not.

---

[4] Cooke, op. cit., pp. 20-1.

Music gives us the experience pure, "without the need of falsifying ideas and images-words or pictures."[5]

This theory has quite specific implications on what the character of musical experience should be. Cooke holds that proper musical experience results in emotional sharing of the feeling of the composer.

> The truly musical person with a normal capacity to respond to emotion, immediately apprehends the emotional content of a piece of music to the degree that he can experience it.[6] The listener thus makes direct contact with the mind of a great artist, "interpreting" his expression of emotion in the same way that he will "interpret" an emotional letter from a friend: in both cases, mind meets mind as far as possible. And if the listener has no capacity for feeling real grief (as opposed to petty chagrin), he will, of course, not really comprehend the Funeral March at all.[7]

When we experience Beethoven's Funeral March to the *Eroica* correctly, we have identically the same feeling as Beethoven experienced which prompted him to write it. The listener's

> capacity for feeling grief . . . will be aroused by the music into feeling . . . the personal grief of Beethoven, made incarnate by him in that music. *He will feel as he has never felt before*.[8]

It is clear that understanding the work requires that we experience it in a certain way. The composer's own experience functions here as a norm for proper understanding of the work.

---

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 272.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

This theory does not necessarily require that the composer is the authority in what he expresses. This would follow only if it was assumed that the composer knows exactly what he intends to express. But, he often does not.

> even the composer cannot put into words the feelings expressed in his music; if he could, he would have no need to write music at all. Moreover, he is not always aware exactly what feelings he has expressed, since they have arisen out of his unconscious and found expression in a language which is not explicit like that of speech.[9]

One of the main motivations of the advocates of the present theory that music is a language of feeling is to provide an account of music which will insure it a central place in culture. Cooke is quite specific about this, comparing music with literature.

> When we try to assess the achievement of a great literary artist, one of the chief ways in which we approach his work is to examine it as a report on human experience. We feel that, in his art, he has said something significant in relation to life as it is lived. . . .[10]

But when we approach musical value, the situation is different.

> The same is unfortunately not felt to be true of the artist who makes his contribution to human culture . . . in . . . music. Music is widely regarded . . . as "pure" inexpressive art, like architecture. . . . Instead of responding to

---

[9] _Ibid._, p. 254.

[10] _Ibid._, p. ix.

> music as what it is--the expression of man's deepest self--we tend to to regard it more and more as a purely decorative art.[11]

Thus, if we regard music as pure form or a pattern of sounds, we misapprehend its "true nature, purpose, and value."[12] The theory in question quite obviously assumes that composers are very special people in that they have experiences of which most of us are not capable, and at the same time possess the technical skills to record them adequately in their artworks. Unless this is accepted, a theory which emphasizes communication of experience would be hard pressed to explain musical worth.

This theory gives us a sense in which it can be said that music has meaning. Saying that music has meaning is saying that it is the expression of the composer's experience. This theory is in direct opposition to the claim of the Formalists that music is patterned sound to which we respond having no meaning or reference beyond itself. In musical experience we take the sounds we hear, on the present view, as indicative of the experience of the composer, and to hear music in this way is obviously to take it as having a meaning.

A main problem for this position is that of showing how it is possible to use music in the manner which the theory specifies. A language of feeling presupposes elements having fixed meanings which are capable of recording symbolically the feeling which the composer wishes to express. I want to turn now to Cooke's explication of the claim that music is a language containing such elements.

---

[11] _Ibid._, p. ix.

[12] _Ibid._, p. x.

2) Cooke's Theory of Music as Expressive Language.

How is it possible for absolute music to fulfill the claims that have been made by these theorists? In addition, what reasons are there for thinking that music could be a language of feeling? The arguments that have been given to sustain this by the traditional theorists are sketchy indeed. For example, Dewey merely states that "because art is expressive, it is a language."[13] This is at least not obviously true. Faces are expressive as well, but it is not apparent that their expressiveness is linguistic in character. Cooke offers us, however, an argument that supposedly sustains the thesis that music is a language consisting of elements having fixed meanings.[14] Ultimately, I shall show that this argument is not acceptable, but it will be useful to examine it to see the problems involved in attempting to establish this aspect of the present theory.

There are two stages in Cooke's argument that music is a language of feeling. First, he attempts to establish a theory of musical expression and show generally the means whereby music can be used to express the feeling of the composer and communicate it to others. Then, secondly, he goes on from this theory of expression to argue for the existence of separate musical elements having fixed meaning. His theory of musical expression, then, serves as the ground for his theory that music is a language.

---

[13] Dewey, _op_. _cit_., p. 106.

[14] Deryck Cooke, _op_. _cit_., pp. 34-163.

Cooke's theory of expression is based on an analysis of music into basic expressive elements, the "tonal tensions," the "vitalizing agents," and the "characterizing agents." The "tonal tensions" are the tensions that exist in Western music due to the posibility of establishing a given key, or tonal center. Once such a center is established, it is a familiar fact that the tones of the scale exhibit various degrees of tension relative to a tonic note. The fourth and fifth degrees of the scale are points of relative repose, while the minor sixth or major seventh exhibit tension which seem to demand resolution.

Cooke proceeds from these remarks to argue that each tonal tension in the chromatic scale is capable of being used to convey a particular kind of feeling. His position is that the tones of the major mode are used to express the "positive" feelings, roughly those which are pleasant to experience, and the minor mode is used to express the "negative" or painful feelings:

> It is a commonplace that the positive emotions (joy, confidence, love, serenity, triumph, etc.) are expressed by major music, and the negative

> emotions (sorrow, fear, hate, disquiet, despair) by minor music.[15]

It is alleged that each tone in the major and minor modes has its own peculiar expressive capacity. Thus, the major third is expressive of joy, the major sixth expresses "pleasurable longing." The minor second is characterized as "spiritless anguish," while the minor third is "stoic acceptance."[16] That these expressive attributions do correctly apply is argued by appeal to examples taken from both vocal and instrumental music. The technique of argument is similar to that of showing that a certain word really has the meaning it is alleged to have by giving examples of its actual use in sentences, where these examples are consistent with the alleged meaning.

However, we must note an important qualification of his claims about the expressive power of tones. The expressive meaning of any given passage, he claims, depends not only upon which tones are present in that passage but on how they are emphasized. This qualification serves to introduce his second expressive classification, the "vitalizing agents," of volume, tempo, and pitch. These elements function to characterize further whatever feeling is expressed by means of the tonal tensions:

---

[15] _Ibid._, pp. 50-1.

[16] _Ibid._, p. 90.

> . . . a composer does not express pleasure or pain simply by using the major or minor system, but by bringing forward or emphasizing certain tensions in these systems, in certain ways. This emphasis and these ways derive entirely from the use of the vitalizing agents. . . .[17]

Cooke is claiming here that sadness can be changed to despair by increasing volume, lowering pitch, and slowing the tempo in the minor mode. Likewise, joy can become exhuberance by increasing the volume and tempo of a passage in the major mode. These agents, therefore, serve to define the degree of the basic feeling which is expressed. He offers the following in support of this.

> If we think of a group of people talking, it is obvious that the more excited they become, the louder, quicker, and higher their voices will get; the more relaxed they become, the softer, slower, and lower they will speak. . . . The same correspondences exist in physical action. . . .[18]

The final expressive elements in Cooke's analysis are the "characterizing agents" of tone-color and texture which serve in turn to reinforce the vitalizing agents. In regard to tone-color:

> one need hardly expatiate on the warmly passionate strings, the pastoral flute and oboe, the querolous or comic bassoon, the heroic trumpet, or the solemn trombone. . . .[19]

Thus, tone color functions as an expressive element as well.

---

[17] Ibid., p. 94.

[18] Ibid., p. 94.

[19] Ibid., p. 112.

The sounds of the instruments in the orchestra cause certain affective responses in listeners analogously to the effects of color in painting. In regard to texture he states:

> The connection between thick texture and emotional emphasis and between spare texture and emotional understatement is so obvious as to need no comment.[20]

The warmth of the compositions of Brahms is in part due to their thick texture, whereas the cool refinement and detached elegance of Mozart is determined in part by this composer's preference for spare textures.

Cooke's purposes in determining these elements were to formulate an expressive vocabulary of musical terms having fixed meaning, and to show that the terms of the vocabulary are used in the way that his analysis indicates. Accordingly, we might expect him to claim that a melody which begins on the tonic, rises to the third, and goes on the fifth would be characterized as expressing joy. This is in fact what he does claim, and to argue his case he lists examples from Bach, Handel, Liszt, Beethoven, Mozart, and others, all of which, he alleges, express "an active, assertive emotion of joy."[21] This is the meaning of the term which is written as "1-3-5 (major)" to indicate the prominent notes of the melody. Again, the opening bars of the finale of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony (the Pathetique) are an example of descending from the dominant to the tonic in the minor mode, an instance of 5-3-1 (minor), and this term is used to express a "painful emotion, in a context of finality: acceptance of or yielding to grief. . . ."[22] All in all Cooke lists sixteen such terms with their emotive meanings, listing a plenitude of examples which illustrate each case. Many of these examples are selected from vocal music for the purpose of showing that the emotive meaning is what it is claimed to be.

---

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

The precise affective meaning of these terms is not statable in ordinary English. The most that a term such as "sad" can do is indicate the general character of the expressive meaning of the work. In reference to an analysis of Mozart's Fortieth Symphony, Cooke claims the following.

> My analysis has had to be expressed in the ambiguous medium of words, but let it not be thought that it is intended in any way as a "translation"; it is meant to be a clue to lead back to the music itself. The words "anguish," "joy," "despair," and "obsession" are only hazy (but, one hopes, basically accurate) symbols for the particular kind and degree of anguish, joy, despair, and obsession which Mozart expressed precisely in his Fortieth Symphony and which we can only experience by listening to that work.[23]

Each work which is correctly described as sad differs from other works in the subtlty of its particular affective content, a content which must be experienced to be known. Each composer uses the musical language in his own unique way to present us with his affective experience, so that in spite of the use of names of feelings to classify the affective meanings of the musical vocabulary, its precise affective meaning varies due to the individual use of it by composers. The sadness expressed by Tchaikovsky is very different in affective character from that of Brahms.

---

[22] Ibid., p. 133.

[23] Ibid., p. 251.

The isolation of this musical vocabulary is the goal which Cooke is seeking to justify the claim that music is a language of feeling. On his view this justification has been what has been lacking in previous accounts which have affirmed that music was the symbolic expression of the composer's affective experience, and which rendered such accounts *prima facie* implausible for the apparently totally abstract art of absolute music. Given this account of the musical language whereby communication of feeling is shown to be possible, such objections should be waived.

3) *Critical Discussion of the Theory*.

In this section I shall argue against the Expressionist theory that music is a language which is used to record the affective experience of the composer. My argument against this position will be divided into three parts. First, I shall argue against the position that creativity is symbolic self-expression of feeling. Secondly, I shall show that the argument put forth by Cooke to show that music is a language is a failure. Thirdly, I shall set forth an epistemological consideration which is destructive for the theoretical implications about musical experience as the experience of the feelings of the composer. Generally, my purpose is to bring up enough questions about this theory to show that it is no longer capable of defense as a viable theory of absolute music.

a) Creativity.

The position on creativity of the present view is that musical creation is the attempt of the composer to record some aspect of his affective experience. Let us note first that this doctrine is at odds with what would be ordinarily held about musical composition. Suppose, for example, that we found out that Bach in the composition of the Art of Fugue did not intend to record an affective experience of his own, but rather intended to create a large scale, well structured work that would be interesting to listen to. On the present position we would be required to say that Bach's activity was not really artistic creation but something else entirely. Moreover, since the work itself was not a product of self-expression, we should rule it out as a work of art music. This rather obviously goes against our intuitions, so we should expect some powerful reasons from the advocates of this view to show that we are mistaken.

Instead, when one examines the arguments of those who adhere to this position, what one finds is that it is assumed that the business of the composer is expression of his affective experience, and that the main thrust of their discursion is to clarify just what "expression" means. In fact there is little argument offered to support this original contention. For example, Ducasse simply asserts that:

> Anyone who . . . has ever felt the art impulse and is capable of describing accurately his then psychological state will I think unhesitatingly declare that his endeavor was to . . . give adequate embodiment in words, lines, colors, or what not, to some particular and probably nameless feelings. . . .[24]

Thus, it is simply affirmed that introspective examination will validate this basic assumption, and, perhaps, if we were to deny this, it might be claimed that we were among those not capable of describing our experiences accurately. The question-begging character of Ducasse's statement is obvious, and, unfortunately, he provides no further argument in support of his contention. In fact, the proponents of the theory that music is symbolic expression of feeling do no more to argue their theory than do the traditional expression theorists discussed in Chapter One of this essay.

When one turns to Deryck Cooke's position, one finds little more to support the claim about creation. Cooke's statements show that he finds the assumption that composers express their feelings in musical compositions warranted on the basis of the created musical product being described as expressive, or as expressions of feeling. But this is a case of assuming the existence of a necessary connection between expressive product and the process of creation, whereby the expressiveness of the former allegedly entails that the process by which it was created was self-expression. This inference is no more valid when performed from product to process than the converse. We cannot argue from the proposition that this particular piece of music expresses sadness to the conclusion that the composer was expressing his feeling of sadness in composing the music. We can no more argue this than we could infer that a sad face (a face expressing sadness) implies that the person is expressing his own feeling of sadness. The person may simply be pretending, or acting, or we may simply be indicating his general facial character, commenting on it as an expression. Generally, there is no necessary connection between expressive behavior and a person expressing his feelings required by Cooke's comments. Similarly, in regard to music, there is no conceptual difficulty in affirming the emotional expressiveness of the product and asserting that the composer was not expressing his feelings, but only making an object that is expressive of some feeling. There is a logical gap, that is to say, in arguing that the expressiveness of the product entails that the act of creation was that of self-expression. One can, of course, affirm in spite of these considerations that perhaps compositional activity is self-expression of feeling in the manner in which this theory describes. But one cannot simply conclude this from considerations about the product.

---

[24] C. J. Ducasse, op. cit., p. 18.

I shall not be content, however, to maintain only that this doctrine of expression has not been successfully argued. I want to show that there is some reason for rejection of it. It must be admitted that the facts of artistic creation are difficult to obtain, and that in many of the cases where we have indisputable works of musical art, we are not in a favorable position to ascertain just exactly what occurred in the process of creation. However, while the situation is difficult, it is not impossible. If one examines what some composers have written about musical creation, their comments do not bear out the claims of the theory under examination. For example, Stravinsky in the Poetics of Music nowhere affirms anything resembling the position that musical composition is symbolic self-expression by means of a language. Stravinsky's own remarks imply that musical composition for him is the arrangement of musical sound into interesting patterns.

> The idea of work to be done is for me so closely bound up with the idea of the arranging of materials. . . . A composer improvises aimlessly the way an animal grubs about. Both of them go

> grubbing about because they yield to a compulsion to seek things out.[25]

These statements do not imply what the present theory affirms. Consider Roger Sessions' more precise comments about the creative process.

> The composer . . . "has an idea"--an idea, let me make clear, consisting of definite musical notes and rhythms which will engender for him the momentum with which his musical thought proceeds. . . . The process of execution is first of all that of listening inwardly to the music as it shapes itself; of allowing the music to grow; of following both inspiration and conception wherever they may lead.[26]

The "idea" that Sessions describes is not the idea of arranging musical elements to represent a particular feeling. Musical composition, for him, is the arranging of musical elements for no other purpose than the creation of a musical structure. None of Sessions comments about his own creative work bear out the account given by the present theory. Of course, it may be said that Sessions is not a composer, but this is much more difficult to believe than that the doctrine put forward here about creation is mistaken.

Such examples do not decisively refute this theory, but they do call for a better explanation than what we have been given so far. It is not sufficient to reply merely that these composers have not introspected carefully enough as Ducasse might. Nor is it sufficient to reply, as Cooke sometimes does, that the composer really does express himself but does so unconsciously.[27] This is not helpful because there is at present no well founded theory of "unconscious expression," and so no way to tell if the claim is true. Indeed, Cooke holds this to be reasonable not on the basis of considerations about the creative act, but rather simply assumes its truth based on the aforementioned assumption that the musical product is self-expression of the composer. This in turn is assumed merely on the basis of music being described as sad, cheerful, and so on. Obviously, if such description admits of explanation by a different hypothesis, for example that such words only serve to indicate the expressive character of the product alone, then the doctrine of self-expression need not be accepted, and we need not have to appeal to the obviously suspect technique of claiming that a doctrine of creation is true that requires the composer to be unconscious of its truth.

---

[25] Igor Stravinsky, Poetics of Music (New York: Vintage Books, 1947), pp. 54, 56.

[26] Roger Sessions, "The Composer and his Message," A Modern Book of Aesthetics, ed. Melvin Rader, 4th edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972), p. 305-6.

A further implication of the theory is that in the activity of composing his six-hundred and twenty-six works, Mozart was in every single case recording his own affective experience. But, furthermore, if these pieces contain individual movements with contrasting themes, as the great majority of them do, then we must say that Mozart recorded thousands of his affective experiences in his works. It is not plausible to assume that in his thirty-five years, Mozart had this many emotional experiences that could have been worth preserving for posterity. We can agree that beyond question there are some cases where a composer may attempt to embody his own feelings in music. The case of Gustav Mahler's Sixth Symphony may be a case in point in virtue of Alma Mahler's statement that it was written as a response to the tragic death of one of his children.[28] Again, Tovey affirms that Beethoven's Sonata Les Adieux embodies Beethoven's feelings on parting from the archduke Rudolf.[29] But the question is whether we must take these instances as providing the basis for a sound theory of musical creation, or whether we are only justified in taking self-expression as *one* mode of musical creation among others. If we say that in some cases of artistic creation the composer was simply arranging materials, or even arranging materials to create an expressive object, then we can include as musical works of art a large number of works that we would otherwise have to rule out.

---

[27] Cooke, op. cit., p. 254.

---

[28] Alma Mahler, *Memories and Letters* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 65.

[29] Donald Tovey, *The Forms of Music* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 169.

It is a further problem with this theory that it offers us an unsupported picture of the artist as a special kind of person, a genius with special insight into experience. We can agree that good artists are special kinds of people, but their specialty consists in being good at what they do as artists. There is no reason whatsoever for calling them "geniuses" any more than for thinking philosophers or scientists to be geniuses if they are good at what they do. In both cases we have gifted individuals who are trained and skillful at what they do and capable of producing works which are valuable. Neither is the claim that the experience of artists is more valuable than the experience of more ordinary mortals true. It is certainly not true that composers are persons with more than ordinary moral insight if one can judge this by their actions. It is notorious that Richard Wagner seduced the wives of some of his most faithful admirers on the grounds of his rights as a superior human being. Likewise, Beethoven cheated his publishers by raising the price on rights to his compositions. Nor can it be defended that the affective experiences of composers is more valuable and insightful than ordinary men. The poorest cobbler is capable of profound experiences in life resulting from devoted and unselfish love of his wife and children, and genuine concern and compassion for the welfare of mankind. There is no reason to suppose that the artist is any more capable of feelings of this sort or has any more insight into them than many other men who are not artists. Indeed, if he is a rogue, as some artists have been, there is good reason to suppose him less capable. Generally, artists are far better thought of as craftsmen, persons endowed with sensitivity to the arrangement of tones, paint, or words, where such sensitivity is *only a* difference in kind to the sensitivity of the philosopher for logical relations. The view of the composer as a genius is nothing more than a Romantic anachronism, in part perpetuated for obvious reasons of ego-satisfaction, by artists themselves. It is worth noting that before the Romantic era, composers were thought of as inventors or craftsmen. The life of Bach, if one reads his biographers, was no different in terms of moral or cognitive insights than those of other *burgers* of his community. His distinction consisted in his sensitivity to the organization of structures of sound. If one simply reads the facts of his life the difference between Bach and other men is not that Bach had more insight into feelings, but that he had more insight into how to write musical counterpoint.

The claims that these theories make about creativity are unjustified and inconsistent with what too many of the facts are taken to be. We may agree that we could be mistaken on a number of points about musical creation, but we have not been given sufficient reason to establish the present theory. Moreover, I have argued that there is considerable positive reason for its rejection. I shall proceed now to a discussion of the musical art product, and show that the implications of this Expressionist position are no better here.

b) Cooke's Theory of Music as Language.

The theory under discussion is that music is a language of feeling, and in this section I shall discuss the specific argument that the musical product is a language offered by Cooke. On Cooke's theory of musical meaning, the major-minor scale system is causally connected with the "positive" and "negative" emotions. Accordingly, the major second is alleged by Cooke to express pleasurable longing "when it is used in a major context as a whole tone tension down to the tonic."[30] The minor second is characterized as spiritless anguish when it is used as a semi-tonal progression down to the tonic, and so on with the remainder of the tones. These tonal elements are the basis for the definitions of the terms of the musical vocabulary Cooke argues for. Yet, notice that the definitions Cooke gives of the musical terms are based only on the tonal tensions and on one vitalizing agent, their ascending or descending structure. The other vitalizing agents of volume, tempo, and pitch, and the characterizing agents of tone-color and texture, play no role in determining the meanings of the basic musical terms. The reason why the other agents play no role is that if volume, pitch, tempo, tone-color and texture were allowed to contribute to the expressive meaning of a term, the specification of a vocabulary of expressive terms that have the same meaning in different musical contexts would be impossible. What Cooke must do to maintain an expressive vocabulary, is maintain that 1-3-5 (major), for example, has one meaning regardless of what instrument plays it, how fast it is played, and at what pitch it is played. If there are not some features of the term that are nonessential to its meaning in this way, every musical phrase would have its own unique expressive meaning and a vocabulary of terms which preserve their meaning would be impossible.

---

[30] Cooke, op. cit., p. 76.

Yet, it is the case that these factors of pitch, tempo, and volume, and the characterizing agents do have an effect on the expressive character of a musical passage, and Cooke's notion of a vocabulary that has meaning independent of these other agents is not valid. For example, 1-3-5 (major) does not have the same expressive meaning when it is played allegro by a piccolo as when it is played largo on a tuba. In the former case, Cooke's characterization of this term is very likely what we would say. In the latter case the tempo and dark tone color of the instrument changes the meaning drastically. It would be described as somber, even sinister in character.

Furthermore, recall that is Cooke's stated position that the vitalizing and characterizing agents function to affect the *degree* of the basic tonal tensions of the term, so that sadness changes to despair by suitably altering the pitch, volume, tempo, or tone-color of the passage. If this is so, then 1-3-5 (minor) which expresses an outgoing feeling of sadness, does not have the same basic meaning regardless of the pitch, volume, tempo, or tone color *on Cooke's own position*. If 1-3-5 (minor) has the expressive meaning of sadness when played *mezzo-forte andante*, and the expressive meaning of despair when played *fortissimo largo*, then the term does not have one basic meaning as his theory of a musical vocabulary requires. Cooke's theory is, therefore, *incoherent* as a theory.

Let us also notice one further difficulty with this musical vocabulary. Consider the term 5-3-1 (major). This term is rarely present in exactly this form in any musical passage. Rather it appears as 5-4-3-2-1, or 5-3-2-1, or 5-4-3-1, or even other possible combinations, and in these combinations it is alleged by Cooke to have the same meaning, namely an expression of consolation. Notice, however, that if it appears as 5-3-2-1 in a passage, we must include the expressive meaning correlated with the major second in this context, namely pleasurable longing, so that we must include this as part of the meaning of the term. Moreover, if the fourth degree of the scale is included with its expressive meaning of pathos, as a semitonal tension down to the major third,[31] we have a potpourri of emotions succeeding one another rather than the simple meaning of consolation claimed by Cooke. Indeed, if the tonal tensions have the meanings he alleges, it would be impossible to have any term expressing one simple feeling, as he states, unless it occurred in its pure form, which Cooke himself admits is rarely the case. This would make the appearance of his basic terms so rare as to make their detection insignificant for musical aesthetics.

The unacceptability of Cooke's position that music is a language does not entail the unacceptability of his doctrine of symbolic self-expression. That is, it still could be true that music is used to expressing feelings and that such expression is experienced by the listener. The doctrine in question, in other words, could be reformulated without the claim that music is a language having a vocabulary, as the position that the musical product is the expression of the feelings of the composer and is consequently symbolic self-expression. I do not think, however, that this reformulation yields a successful theory, as I will show in the following section in my discussion of musical experience.

---

[31] Ibid., pp. 80-4.

c) Musical Experience.

On this theory musical experience is emotional in character. We come to know the composer's feelings directly by having them aroused in us. It is maintained by Cooke that in the experience of music we feel the personal experience of the composer in response to some particular event, e.g. Beethoven's grief over the death of revolutionaires. This position has been offered as an account of the experience of representational works, most notably literature and painting. For example, Leo Tolstoy holds this position in *What is Art?*[32] Cooke specifically mentions literature and compares music favorably to it, holding that music furnishes us with a report on human experience.

The point I wish to make, however, is that such an account is not valid even for representational works, and, if this is so its plausibility as an account of musical experience is not sustainable either. It is important to realize that the claim here is that what the work conveys is the artist's feelings in response to a situation that he has experienced. It may very well be true that some works have been undertaken with this point of view in mind, but it is not true that this is a reasonable account of our experience of them. It is not true that we experience

---

[32] Leo Tolstoy, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

Guernica, for example, in the same way that we would experience the actual situation which inspired it. And, on this account, it is Picasso's feelings about the actual event that we should experience. The fact that we are not witnessing the actual occurrence but a depiction of an actual occurrence functions to make us view the situation in a way different from that of the actual event. Women do not scream and faint, for example, when they contemplate Guernica although at least some do when they observe a horrible death. We are not seeing real human bodies disfigured by bombing, but only a representation thereof. Indeed, if our feelings were those experienced at the real occurrence, Guernica, would be unbearable to observe.

It is not being denied here that the experience of such works is profoundly felt. Picasso's mural is magnificent in its expressive intensity. But we experience the expressiveness of this work to a large extent by means of an imaginative identification with what is depicted: we understand that the real situation was like by identification in imagination with the depicted characters in the work. The experience is powerful, unquestionably, but not as powerful as if we were to experience the actual events at first hand. We are awed by the work, certainly, and are aware of the feeling of moral outrage that inspired it, but this is not the same as experiencing moral outrage ourselves.

I have picked Picasso's mural because it is the most favorable kind of work to use to discuss this theory. Let us notice here that the theory is shown to be highly limited if one broadens his choice of examples. The theory acquires the plausibility it has from a selection of a certain class of representational works and treating them as paradigms for the experience of art. Yet, if one selects an example from outside this narrow range, Poussin's _The Abduction of the Sabine Women_, for instance, the theory loses any vestige of plausibility. In spite of the fact that Poussin's work is the depiction of a brutal and violent episode, and in this respect compares favorably with _Guernica_, it would be altogether wrong to suggest that our experience in viewing this work is the same as our experience of the actual event would be. The work is refined and cool, the figures poised, even statuesque. The lighting and color is meticulous, the figures placed just the right way to achieve rhythmic fluidity on the canvas. It is very difficult to have the kind of imaginative sympathetic experience that comes so easily to _Guernica_ in Poussin's work.

As I have noted, Cooke's references to literature indicate that he wishes merely to transfer what he regards as a successful theory for representational works to a presentational art. If the theory is not plausible as an explanation for the experience of representational works, however, it is not possible simply to transfer the theory to absolute music. Indeed, the fact that we are dealing in the case of music with a presentational art leads to further difficulties.

The following point is crucial for the theory that the musical product is symbolic self-expression. If it is the intent of the composer to create an expressive object which could reveal his own feelings to others, then the expressive devices available to him should be precise. If there were no precise musical techniques whereby he could reveal his feelings, then it would be unreasonable to select music as a means for such self-expression. What we must investigate, then, is the "objectivity" of musical expression, or alternatively, the capacity of music to express particular feelings unambiguously to an audience.

I want to begin by focusing on the nature of what is allegedly communicated by musical means. Here it is claimed that music can be used to record the experiences of the composers in response to specific situations. There is, however, considerable question as to whether music alone could communicate such specific feelings. In the case of feelings such as grief over annihilation, joy over the beauty of nature, and so on, it is the situation that provides the context for the feeling and makes it a feeling about something in particular. One's specific anger at someone is identified by what that person did to him. Yet in the case of listening to absolute music, there is no context that we would relate such feelings to other than music itself. Even if Beethoven's music did arouse grief in us when we listened to it, we could not relate our experienced grief to any particular situation Beethoven may have been in without considerable autobiographical information about him. In the countless cases where no such information does exist, one simply cannot specify any situation whatever to determine the feelings one may experience in response to the music. In fact, Cooke's own statements about what Beethoven's music expresses show that he bases his claim not on the music but on biographical information about Beethoven.

> We know that Beethoven was intoxicated by the libertarian ideals of the French Revolution. . . . One of the emotions aroused in Beethoven by the heroic libertarian ideal was, as we know, a deep grief for the unhappy fate that awaited many a liberator.[33]

We know these things based on independent biographical evidence, not on the basis of the music alone. This is unsatisfactory because Cooke'e theory is that music is able to express unambiguously the feelings of the composer, not the theory that music does this with the aid of biographical evidence. If one considers Brahms' _B_-_flat_ _major_ _Quartet_, rather than the better known _Eroica_ symphony, the absence of autobiographical information about Brahms will make one less likely to say that any specific feeling is communicated. The conclusion of these considerations is that we cannot become acquainted with Beethoven's grief over the annihilation of liberators merely by listening to his music. Thus, if it is meant that the function of music is communicating experiences where this means communicating such specific experiences, then in the case of absolute music this would be impossible.

---

[33] Cooke, _op_. _cit_., pp. 16-7.

There is in addition a more subtle epistemological difficulty with this theory. How can we be assured of Cooke's claim that we really are experiencing the feeling of Beethoven when we listen to his music even if we are given the appropriate biographical evidence. It is a basic tenet of Expressionist theory that music can do something that language cannot do, make us directly aware of the composer's affective experience. Music does this "without the need of falsifying ideas and images-words or pictures."[34] But, how shall we confirm whether our affective experience of the work is the affective experience that allegedly was embodied in the work by the composer? How can we tell whether or not communication actually has taken place?

Even if we do appeal to biographical information, we cannot be assured of the correctness of our response, for biographical information, given that we can obtain it and that it is accurate, will only give a description in words of the experience that the work allegedly conveys. While this may serve to indicate the meaning, it is, by Cooke's own statements, not the precise meaning of the work. The precise meaning, indeed, can only be detected by experiencing the music, and we are left with no way of determining whether our experience of the work actually does constitute its meaning. If it is said that the nature and function of musical artworks is to be used to record the affective experiences of the composer, and if, on analysis it turns out that there is no means whereby one could know that one had correctly ascertained what the alleged embodied experience actually was, then there is ultimately no way of confirming whether musical artworks actually do fulfill their stated function. The unique function of music to directly convey affective experiences is bought at the price of never knowing when communication between composer and listener takes place.

---

[34] Ibid., p. 272.

The theory cannot be saved by weakening it and maintaining that verbal description of musical meaning is possible after all. For if we could understand the composer's experience without the work, there would be no need for the work, and it is a main assumption of Expressionist theory that works of art have their reason for being in their capacity to transmit the experiences of the composer directly, so that we can become acquainted with these experiences at first hand. If language could do the job just as well, the force of this theory would vanish. Moreover, we would have no definition of music in the sense of stating its essential conditions. Thus, Cooke's theory turns out to be otiose, because the norm it gives for correct experience of the work is impossible to use: it is the work alone that we must appeal to due to the logical impossibility of comparison of individual experiences.

The situation for Cooke's theory is worse than this, however. His claim is that feeling-terms such as sad, joyful, etc., are rough indications or guides to music which presupposes the correctness of his theory of expression, that certain tonal tensions cause certain sorts of feeling responses in listeners. If this were true we could at least get some indication of whether our experience was the same as the composer's even if in the last analysis we could not know. But the claim that music is as unambiguously expressive as this is not without considerable question. In what follows, I shall discuss Cooke's specific theory of expression that certain passages of music clearly express certain sorts of feelings.

Let us first note that the advocates of this theory make a great deal of the fact that some persons describe music in terms of feeling terms where such descriptions at least seem relevant to musical appreciation. It is their claim that Expressionist theory successfully accounts for such attribution whereas on Formalist aesthetics such descriptions are not relevant to musical appreciation. Yet, the account of the function of expression-terms in musical appreciation is not without question. Cooke, and Ducasse as well, both speak of expression of feeling as evocation of it in the listener. The listener "opens himself up," and the feeling expressed is experienced by him. One cannot maintain, however, that expression and evocation are conceptually identical. A face which expresses sadness need not evoke it in someone who observes the expression. But neither does a landslide which evokes fear in mountain climbers necessarily express it. One cannot simply assert, therefore, that if music expresses some particular generalized mood, that it will cause that mood in listeners, or that it is detected by listeners by experiencing it. The two claims are logically separate and should not be confused as both Ducasse and Cooke confuse them. Moreover, there is some reason for believing that some feelings music allegedly expresses are not caused in listeners at all. If music expresses grief, for example, it would be difficult to see how it would be experienced voluntarily by a listener. This is true for all of the so-called negative emotions that Cooke cites as capable of being expressed musically. One cannot argue, therefore, that since music is described as cheerful, sad, and so on, that these feelings are caused in listeners. If so, one cannot safely assume that musical experience is emotional in character in the manner that the theory assumes. In this respect Langer's theory of musical meaning as recognized from the music rather than caused in the listener is truer to the facts.

But, secondly, the theory of expression provided by Cooke is not strong enough to sustain the position that feeling words such as sad, joyful, etc., provide even rough indications of musical meaning. For this to be true it should be possible to cite the approximate affective meaning of a musical passage and justify one's claim against rival interpretations. How would one justify the claim that a piece of absolute music expressed a given feeling? Here we are speaking of expression of a feeling *tout court*, and not just expression of a feeling to some person. It is without doubt that some people find their experience of music aptly described in terms of the feeling and emotion terms in everyday use. But it is a separate question entirely whether or not such musical expression is in any way objective, i.e. whether or not one can appeal to rules, conventions, or conditions which would justify one in his claim that music was sad, and rule out the claim that it was cheerful.

Cooke's analysis of the elements of expression at least gives us the features of music that are appealed to for such a justification. That a given passage expressed jubilation, for example, would be justified by appealing to the facts that it was in the major, that it was *forte*, that it was heavily accented, fast in pace, and so on. Yet, it can be asked if the citing of such features is ever sufficient to warrant the attribution of only one specific emotion-word. Cooke has presented with his theory of expression an argument that purportedly shows how it is possible to ascribe exactly certain emotion terms to music. Thus, he argues that the minor second expresses just one emotional state, namely spiritless anguish, that the major third expresses only joy, and so on for the remainder of the terms of the chromatic scale. His justification for this, however, is based in part on an appeal to vocal music, music for which the words of the sung text effectively beg the question in his favor. For, the question is whether absolute music alone can convey these emotional states to listeners, and it is open to the sceptic to reply that the musical product is so described on the basis of the text and not the music.

In other cases that Cooke discusses, such as the well-known *Eroica Symphony*, Mozart's *Fortieth Symphony*, and Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony*,[35] which are cases of absolute music, we cannot make this charge of circularity. However, in these cases the expressive attributions given are given on the basis of information about the composer's life. They seem precise, even indisputable, in virtue of the biographical information about the composer being so well known that it provides a tacet context for Cooke's interpretation. In the case of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, for example, there is a well-known letter to his brother Modeste which in effect tells us how Tchaikovsky thought of his symphony, and why he subtitled it the Pathetique. In the case of Mozart's Fortieth Symphony, the same kind of biographical information is used to characterize the music as tragic, expressive of profound melancholy, and so forth. If the question is whether music alone is an expressive device capable of conveying feeling and emotion unambiguously to us, then we must say that Cooke has failed to prove his case. It is one thing to provide an expressive interpretation of a work based on how the composer viewed it, or based on what his experiences were at the time of composition, and another to ascertain the expressive meaning of the work from a consideration of it alone.

---

[35] For his discussion of Mozart see *Ibid.*, pp. 232-52.

If we appeal to the work itself to decide the issue of unambiguous expression, what we find is that our precise expressive attributions are difficult to justify in the case of particular types of feelings. We can appeal to the major-minor scheme, and various resemblances, but this is hardly sufficient to make the case. It is true, as Cooke notes, that not just anything we say about certain pieces of music in the way of expressive attribution will do. The finale of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony is definitely not cheerful nor is the first movement of the Beethoven Seventh Symphony sad, and we can rule out these claims based on the factors of expression that he mentions. But, we cannot infer from this that the major-minor mode, the vitalizing, and characterizing agents of Cooke are sufficient to warrant exact expressions. The major-minor convention only allows for the interpretation of positive and negative emotions, and the resemblances music unquestionably bears to specific kinds of feelings is actually meagre, limited to the sharing of only a few common features. Slow music does have the tempo of sad people, for example, just as soft music can be like sad people speaking. But it is also true that people move slowly and speak softly when they experience other feelings as well, for example, when they are worried or afraid. Similarly, people speak loudly when they are angry, or exhilerated, but also when they are in despair. Music does bear resemblances to human manifestations of feelings, but human expressions of feeling are many and varied, and we cannot argue merely on the basis of even two or three common properties that a specific kind of feeling is expressed. The result is that expression of specific types of feeling in music is ambiguous.

The expressive situation in music has a counterpart in human expression as well. If we deprive human expressive gestures of their context, we can only guess their meaning. The expressive gesture of holding one's thumbs up can mean triumph in certain contexts, but it could be insulting in others. If we deprive the gesture of its context, there is no way of determining its meaning. Again, the gesture of hissing to express disdain can be interpreted entirely differently in another context where it could be nothing more than imitation of sound. If we consider facial expressions alone, exaltation can be easily mistaken for horror, anger for determination, and so on. Similarly to music, faces and gestures can easily be identified as expressive, but in terms of an exact determination of a specific type of feeling expressed devoid of context, the criteria are simply too imprecise.

In music we can identify unambiguously only general features of emotion. For example, music can be unambiguously characterized as expressing tension, resolution, forcefulness, motion, relaxation, where these features are common to many emotional states. Tension is a feature of anger, determination, and despair. If so, then the claim that music can unambiguously express certain feeling states is not true, and claims of expressive attributions such as sad, despairing, and so forth, are interpretations of musical passages by individual listeners. If this is so, then any theory which attempts to ground the value of music in its capacity to communicate experience must do considerably more than has been done so far to show just how this is possible.

It is worth noting that the problem of the correct expressive experience of the musical work has been given up by some advocates of this theory. For example, Ducasse holds that the psychological constitution of individuals differs in such a way that many experiences of it are possible, and that any of these is legitimate if controlled by the work. Yet, there is a problem for him as well: how do we know that we have a musical artwork before us? On Ducasse's position, the composer is the only one who can be assured of this, for only he knows if the work embodies the feeling he meant to record. Ducasse is specific on this point.

> Art is the critically controlled purposive activity which aims to create an object having the capacity to reflect to its creator . . . the feeling-images that had dictated the specific form and content he gave the object. . . .[36]

If the object does not reflect the expressed feeling back to the composer, then we do not have a musical work of art. This is an unacceptable implication because it is not just the artist alone who can decide whether an object is a work of art. Whether or not something is such a work depends on the features it has that are capable of being known by anyone, and not just features that are apparent only to the artist himself.

---

[36] C. J. Ducasse, "Art and the Language of the Emotions," A Modern Book of Aesthetics, Fourth Edition, edited by Melvin Rader (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973), p. 72.

Rather than have a single norm, the composer's experience, we now have no norm at all. Any person, regardless of what his constitution may be like, is entitled to his point of view about the expressive content of the work. Toleration in art appreciation should be commended, but this is plainly too much of a good thing. There is no more reason to allow equal weight in determining expressive content than there is in determining the color of an object. If a person can be shown to be incapable of judging color (due to congenital malfunction of a sense organ, disease, etc.), then his opinion of what the color of an object is does not count. If a person can be shown to be incapable of assessing the expressiveness of musical structures due to lack of musical education, peculiar emotional temperament, or the like, then his opinion is not worth having. Musical expression is not precise, but it is not totally devoid of conditions either. As Cooke himself says, we would think it highly peculiar if someone regarded a Funeral March as sanguine.[37] One's experience must not only be controlled by the work, as Ducasse insists, but he must bring to the work a knowledge of the artistic conventions and style relevant to its appreciation.

I shall mention one further implication of this theory. If it is the nature and function of music to be a language which can communicate affective experience, then the proper experience of music cannot be aesthetic in character. If aesthetic experience is characterized as experience of an object simply for the sake of so doing, then it is not the case that attention to music can ever be aesthetic according to what Expressionist theory prescribes. It is one thing to say that the proper experience that results in understanding a work of art is not always aesthetic in character, and this is certainly true of some works of literature. But, it is unacceptable to suggest that the particular art form of absolute music is not to be understood by considering it aesthetically, for the sake of the possible satisfaction such experience might provide. The use of such typical traditional aesthetic terms as beautiful, sublime, and elegant to describe music is at least as frequent as the typical emotion words made so much of by those attracted to the present theory. Any position which could successfully account for the use of both classes of terms, emotive and aesthetic, would be on far more firm philosophical ground, than a theory which requires us to dismiss the aesthetic as an irrelevant aspect of musical experience.

---

[37] Cooke, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

Ducasse, again, attempts to avoid this difficulty by claiming that the value of music is aesthetic in character in that we value the feelings expressed simply for the sake of the satisfaction perceiving them provides. But, in claiming that any feeling that one contemplates is legitimate, he has given up the idea that communication of experience is central to music, and with this has rejected the central tenet of Expressionist theory. He has bought a reasonable characterization of musical value at the price of giving up the theory he set out to defend. I shall devote considerable space in the next chapter to defend the thesis that musical expression in absolute music has aesthetic and not cognitive value.

4) Summary and Conclusion.

In this chapter I have discussed the position that it is the nature of music to be a language of feeling. This position provides a sense to the claim that absolute music has meaning, namely it is a symbolic expression of composers affective experience by means of a kind of language. Although this position has been attractive to many musical theorists, especially those influenced by the Romantic idea of the genius composer who expresses himself in his art, it has been found to be inadequate on examination. This theory can be taken as a response to the Formalist theories of Hanslick and Gurney. The attempt was to provide a viable theory which would show music to be more than just "sounding forms in motion." Although this attempt to respond to the Formalists was unsatisfactory, this does not show the Formalists to be correct in the claim that absolute music is meaningless in any sense and should therefore be regarded only as patterned sound. In my final chapter I shall argue for the claim that music does have meaning.

CHAPTER FOUR

MEANING IN ABSOLUTE MUSIC

The purpose of this chapter is to present a position on musical meaning and its value. In the preceding three chapters I have argued against the credibility of various analyses of musical meaning which were based on versions of the Expression Theory. In so doing, however, it has not been my purpose to support any version of the Formalist Theory of absolute music, the theory which denies the relevance of musical meaning to the appreciation and value of absolute music. Rather than argue that the concept of meaning has no application in musical aesthetics, and thereby support Formalism, I shall present here a thesis about musical meaning which is distinct from the Expressionist claims previously examined.

In the introduction to this essay, I stated that my purpose was that of reconciling the two opposing theories of the Formalists and the Expressionists, and the position I shall take in this chapter fulfills this aim. The crux of the dispute on musical meaning can be traced to two propositions advocated by the Formalist and Expressionist theories. The Expressionist theories of Langer and Cooke assume that musical meaning must be shown to have cognitive value to be valuable at all, that if musical meaning cannot be shown to give knowledge of the composer's personality, knowledge of his attitude to life, or knowledge of feelings, then music must be relegated to mere decoration, or be classified with the sensuous pleasures of food and drink. The Formalist theorists, on the other hand, hold that any theory of music as expression must be absolutely inconsistent with the aesthetic value of music arguing that any attention to expression is irrelevant to the proper perception of music and to the understanding of its value. In this chapter I shall challenge both of these assumptions.

The thesis which I shall defend and which will reconcile these opposing positions is that absolute music does have meaning, but the perception of musical meaning is relevant only to aesthetic appreciation and value. If this thesis can be made out then both of the aforementioned assumptions will be shown to be false, and the way will be open to reconcile the dispute about musical meaning. For, my thesis preserves what the advocates of the Expression theory wish to insist upon, the value of expression in absolute music, but it also preserves a central part of Formalism, that absolute music is aesthetically valuable. It is the preservation of these central tenets that will reconcile these two conflicting positions.

The argument for the above thesis will proceed in the following way. First, I shall present a theory of musical meaning which is distinct from the preceding theories we have considered. The presentation of this theory will draw upon the theories of expression that were considered previously, but will not assume that musical meaning is in any way related to experiences of the composer. Secondly, I shall argue that the understanding of musical meaning is not irrelevant to the appreciation of absolute music. To do this, it will be necessary to examine the main Formalist contentions that purport to show the contrary. For, it is their contention that even if music does have meaning, understanding musical meaning is not relevant to its proper appreciation. Showing that these Formalist arguments are misguided will show that there is at least no reason why we ought not to attend to musical meaning in musical appreciation. Thirdly, a consideration of the issue of musical value will show that we should attend to musical meaning. I shall show that understanding musical meaning is consistent with and contributes to the aesthetic valuation of music, contrary to Formalist theory. In addition, the Expressionist assumption that musical meaning must be shown to have cognitive value will be shown to be misguided, and the opposition of Formalism and Expressionism will be resolved.

1) Musical Expressive Meaning.

In this section I shall present a position on musical meaning that differs from those considered so far. Both

Langer and Cooke hold that music does have meaning as a symbol of feeling or a language of feeling respectively. Both hold the value of absolute music to be related to the experience of the composer, Langer as expression of what he knows, and Cooke as expression of what he has felt. For these theorists, musical value is cognitive in character. I shall maintain in this section, that music does have meaning, but that musical meaning is not necessarily related to the composer's experience. It will be argued that musical meaning results from associations made between musical elements and other states and processes. It is in virtue of these associations that composers can intend their music to be taken in a certain way and can create a musical product expressive of feeling.

Consider the following example of "meaning" in the context of criticism. Deryck Cooke, functioning as a critic rather than a philosopher, is reviewing Eugen Jochum's complete recorded collection of the symphonies of Anton Bruckner.

> Nevertheless, one can only admire his total identification with the essential atmosphere and character of Bruckner's expressive world. There is . . . a great purity, simplicity, and strength-and above all a unique penetration into the profound spirituality of the great Adagio movements. . . . Few of the more structurally integrated performances by other conductors have dug quite so deep into the meaning of the music.[1]

---

[1] Deryck Cooke, The Gramophone, Vol. XLV. No. 534 (November 1967), p. 318.

Here the meaning of the music is what the music expresses: purity, simplicity, strength, profound spirituality. That is, there is nothing in this comment to suggest that an adequate understanding of it requires us to take it in the way that advocates of the Expressionist thesis would urge. We do not have to think of the purity and simplicity as being experiences of the composer, nor must we think of the music as giving us knowledge of the nature of purity and simplicity, analyses which lead to the difficulties we have seen in previous chapters. Rather, the remark is quite consistent with the hypothesis that Bruckner created music which exhibited the expressive meanings alluded to by Cooke. On this latter hypothesis, at least some composers create music which has expressive meaning where musical meaning is not necessarily related to their own personal experiences.

Yet, how are we to analyze musical meaning on such a position, i.e. what does it mean to say that music has expressive meaning? A viable hypothesis is suggested by Cooke's theory of musical expression discussed in the previous chapter. According to Cooke's analysis of expression, music arouses the feelings it expresses in listeners, so that the claim that a given passage of music expresses a certain feeling is justified by appealing to the feelings the listener experiences when listening to music. This causal theory of musical expression has been shown to be inadequate in that the feelings music expresses are often distinct from those it arouses in listeners. The hypothesis that is suggested by Cooke's theory, however, is that music is associated with certain feeling states rather than being the cause of them. Such an analysis would hold that certain musical passages tend to be thought of in terms of emotional states and processes in virtue of certain musical expressive elements, rather than in terms of an alleged causal efficacy of music to directly arouse feeling states in listeners. It is this position that I wish to elaborate in what follows.

If we assume that musical expression amounts to associating music with feelings, then it can be asked what the basis of the association is. The basis of the association is the similarities that music has to feeling states. Thus, musical passages resemble certain features of emotional states in virtue of sharing certain features of such states. For example, tonality enables the presentation of tension and resolution, tempo is correlated with the pace of emotional processes, volume and accent with the intensity of emotion. Furthermore, the timbre, or tone-color, of certain instruments bears a resemblance to certain affective states. The brilliance of the sound of brass instruments, for example, can be correlated with affirmative feelings, the dark sounds of the lower strings with ominous feeling states. In addition to these similarities, the stylistic convention of using the major mode for "positive" feelings and the minor mode for "negative" feelings functions to reinforce the association that music has with feeling.

The hypothesis that I am arguing for is similar to other positions on musical expression based on an alleged "identity of structure" between music and feelings held by Langer and also by Carrol Pratt. It is similar in that expressed feeling on these positions is said to be recognized rather than directly aroused in and felt by the listener. But, the position I wish to urge is quite different from these views in two important respects. First, I shall reject the notion of identity of structure for similarity of structure. Secondly, mere similarity of structure is not the whole story of what is involved in musical expression of feeling and musical meaning generally. In particular, I shall now show that there are certain external factors which function to influence musical expressive meaning. Just what these external factors are can best be brought out by discussing briefly the argument for identity of structure.

The argument given for identity of structure is in fact based on pointing to several features which the musical object shares with certain feelings. For example, Pratt affirms that:

> The word "agitated" refers . . . to a bodily commotion which clearly belongs within the realm of emotion. . . . It involves jumpy sensations,

> inability to keep still, restlessness, tension, an overall muscular and visceral disturbance. . . . It is a form or pattern. . . . Yet the same form or pattern . . . can be compounded of processes which are not bodily or internal at all. We say that the waves of the sea appear agitated, that in storm or wind the sounds of the forest are agitated, or for our purposes still better, that a passage of music is agitated.
>
> Music speaks of emotion only by way of tonal patterns which at the level of form are indistinguishable from the patterns of bodily reverberations. _Music sounds the way emotions feel_.[2]

The most that one should conclude from an argument of this sort is that there is a _resemblance_ between music and the feeling of agitation. To affirm an identity of pattern, something quite different from resemblance, one would presumably have to go considerably further. Indeed, a main problem with this position is that the conditions for one thing being identical in form to another thing are never stated, so it is unclear just how much further one would have to go.

But the most difficult task for this theory is to explain why music does not have identity of form with realms of events and states of affairs other than human feeling states. For, it is obvious that music can share features with things other than such states. The tone poem _La Mer_ by Debussy provides one such example. According to Debussy, the quiet opening of this music, orchestrated with its shimmering strings, suggests in virtue of resemblance the calmness of the sea at sunrise. Again, the slow harmonic motion and steady tempo of Tapiola by Sibelius suggest the vastness and power of the Finnish God of the forests. These are not examples of absolute music, but the point is that music can exhibit features which are suggestive of such natural phenomena in virtue of being similar to these phenomena. These theorists have never asked, in other words, why music should be thought of exclusively in terms of human feeling states. Thus, Pratt's conclusion that music sounds the way emotions feel, the thrust of which is to relate music exclusively to feelings, does not follow. For, music can also sound the way waves and forests look in virtue of resembling such processes.

---

[2] C. C. Pratt, "The Design of Music," _JAAC_, Vol. XII, no. 3 (March 1954), pp. 295-6.

Why absolute music usually is associated with human feelings can be explained according to the theory of musical expression I am proposing if one takes into account that certain external factors account for musical works of art being associated with feeling states rather than other states. In particular, it is in virtue of the social context of their production that such works are associated with feeling. The absolute musical forms of symphony, concerto, sonata, and string quartet became thought of as being expressive of feeling during the Romantic Era in music, a period beginning in the late eighteenth century and extending into the twentieth. It was a main characteristic of the artists of this period to value intense affective experiences, a characteristic that was in marked opposition to their classical predecessors who valued order and good proportion. This emphasis on emotion was manifested in music beginning with the late works of Mozart and Haydn and continuing through Mahler. In addition to the evaluative emphasis placed on experiences involving feeling and emotion, the Romantic movement also held the conviction that art, and especially poetry, was revelatory in character. The experiences they sought were not only marked by intense feeling, but a cognitive value was claimed for them as well. These views about the value of literature were taken up and popularized by writers on music, such as E. T. A. Hoffman and W. H. Wackenroder, and were adopted by the leading composers of the time, Beethoven and Schubert. If it is the prevailing view that music bears an intimate relation to feeling, composers will employ whatever means available to affirm this relation as a stylistic aim. This is what occurred in the Romantic era for the case of absolute music, and this Romantic point of view has determined a perceptual convention by which music is associated with human feeling states by means of the elements of expression mentioned above rather than being associated with other natural phenomena.

One other factor that has lead absolute music to be associated with feeling should be mentioned. The forms of absolute music had their origins in vocal music, in particular the operatic overture the function of which was to provide the dramatic setting for the action that was to follow. The following comment by Henry Leland Clarke illustrates this nicely:

> The most natural musical medium for the dramatic is the orchestra, which evolved in intimate connection with the words and action in opera. After a period of operatic preparation, the orchestra assumed an independent role as a vehicle of dramatic communication. Out of the operatic overture grew the great dramatic form of pure instrumental music, the symphony.[3]

The symphony as a primary form of absolute music was associated with the dramatic from the start, and was, therefore, intimately linked to triumph and tragedy. It was in virtue of this connection with the dramatic that the absolute musical forms of symphony and sonata were so naturally associated by the Romantics with human emotional states.

I wish to affirm, then, that the basis of musical expression is the similarity that musical processes have to other phenomena, and that certain external factors function conventionally to further define the realm of phenomena that music of certain styles is associated with. I have mentioned so far one such perceptual convention associating music with feeling, originating from the social context in which Romantic music was written. It is in favor of the present analysis that musical meaning is not limited to the expression of feeling but encompasses a wide range of other states as well, as I shall now show. In particular, the interests of certain early twentieth century composers were not confined to the expression of feeling states, but included the expression of certain aspects of nature as well. Some of the musical works of Jean Sibelius, Frederick Delius, and Arnold Bax provide notable examples of this kind of musical expressive meaning. Certain passages in Sibelius symphonies, for instance, are highly evocative of images of wind, sky, and space in the manner of poetry.

---

[3] Henry Leland Clarke, "The Basis of Musical Communication," JAAC, Vol. X, No. 3 (March 1952), p. 242.

In the case of these composers there is another perceptual convention in operation in the experience of their works that permits association of this kind. Yet, the meanings that these works have is made possible by the same set of expressive techniques mentioned before, the major-minor modal system, resemblance of musical processes to other processes, and tone-color. In this case, the major-minor modal system is associated with the bright, life-affirming aspects of nature and its dark ominous, brooding side respectively. The resemblances are to natural processes such as the howling of wind or the sudden clap of thunder. Tone-color functions to enhance these modes of expression by being alternately bright or dark in character.

The perceptual convention of associating musical processes with nature has its origin in the history of vocal music, as well as being sanctioned by the composers themselves. In Schubert's song-cycle Die Schone Mullerin, there is a song with a brookside setting in which the pianist's arpeggios are evocative of the gurgling and bubbling of the brook. Associations of this type, where a context is provided, establish a precedent for the case of such associations in absolute music, and the word of the composer is influential in establishing the propriety of the given convention:

> I love the mysterious sounds of the fields and forests, water and mountains. It pleases me greatly to be called an artist of nature, for nature has truly been the book of books for me.[4]

Knowledge that the composer himself sanctions this way of taking his music encourages the adoption of this perceptual convention.

There are other stylistic devices as well that are used by composers for the purpose of giving their music meaning that can be explained in terms of the concept of association. For instance, the following occurs in a discussion of the Eleventh Symphony of Dmitri Shostakovich:

> Its thematic substance draws largely on the revolutionary songs of 1905 which obviously carry a wealth of emotional overtones and associations for Soviet listeners and whose full significance escapes non-Russian audiences.[5]

---

[4] "Jean Sibelius," An Evening with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, a booklet (Chicago: Maxwell Scroge Company, Inc., 1973), p. 20.

[5] Robert Layton, The Gramophone, Vol. XLVI, No. 544 (September 1968), p. 399.

The revolutionary songs have meaning to Russians that they do not have for Westerners. The associated meaning is provided by past experience with the social context in which these songs were sung. In this particular case the associated meaning consists of the tendency the songs have to produce a realm of feelings and images connected with the unsuccessful Russian revolution of 1905 which fuse with the musical events of the symphony. The music of Charles Ives exhibits this same kind of stylistic device in his quotation of _Columbia: The Gem of the Ocean_ in his _Fourth Symphony_. Such compositions are often highly affective in virtue of the poignant combination of the images with music.

It is worth noting that none of these cases are instances of the composer simply giving his music a meaning or telling us how he wishes us to respond to it. If a composer states that he wishes his music to be taken in a certain way, this is a matter of him giving his music a meaning. This is usually accomplished by means of subtitling the work. Beethoven's _Sixth Symphony_, is subtitled _The Pastoral_, and each of its five movements are subtitled as well. Thus, we associate the music of the fourth movement with a storm in virtue of it bearing the title, "The Storm." The music of this movement could just as well be associated with a battle in virtue of its musical characteristics of heavy orchestration and powerful accent. What is absent in this particular case is the existence of a generally accepted convention that warrants association with the natural phenomenon of a storm, and this is why it is appropriate to speak of the composer giving his music a meaning, rather than speaking of his music as having meaning.

The concept of association is more helpful as an explanation of musical meaning than the concept of symbol offered by Langer. The concept of symbol is logically connected with the primitive notion of standing for, as when a ship is a symbol of the church in that it stands for it. It is just this notion of standing for that makes analysis of the expressiveness of a musical art product in terms of symbol so odd. There is no sense in which a musical passage that is expressively melancholy can be said to stand for the melancholy. On the other hand, that such a passage contains elements which are associated with melancholy feelings does not have this difficulty.

An analysis of musical expression in terms of association is not novel and has precedent in previous writers, the most notable of whom is George Santayana. When objects express something to us, according to Santayana, we

> . . . remain aware of their affinities to what is not at the time perceived; that is, we find in them a certain tendency and quality, not original to them, a meaning and a tone which upon investigation we shall see to have been the proper characteristics of other objects and feelings, associated with them once in our experience. The

> hushed reverberations of these associated feelings . . . color the image upon which our attention is fixed.[6]

The position which I am urging defines more explicitly the factors of musical association by explicitly affirming that such associations are based on similarity and certain perceptual conventions. The conventional character of association distinguishes the present account from that of Santayana, according to whom the expression that objects have depends on the accidental nature of one's own personal history. Rather, we learn how to perceive musical meaning in virtue of learning the perceptual rules in force for the proper experience of music in a certain style. It is this conventional character of association that makes musical expression a species of meaning. Understanding musical meaning is like understanding a language in that both are dependent upon knowing the rules or conventions in force which govern the proper use of their elements. This similarity may be why music is spoken of as a "language of feeling."

However, there is an influential article which criticizes associationist theory, attacking Santayana's theory explicitly, Vincent Tomas' "The Concept of Expression in Art." I shall state here why the present account can be defended by discussing Tomas' argument briefly. In this article Tomas refers to Santayana's theory of expression as a "two-terms" theory, where the first term is that which does the expressing (the music) and the second term is what is expressed (the feeling). According to Tomas' account of Santayana's theory, expression depends on the union of these two terms in experience. For the specific case of music,

---

[6] George Santayana, The Sense of Beauty (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), pp. 145-6.

> the listener apprehends the music and the sadness as one thing and not two.[7]

This is so, on Tomas' view, because it is a defining condition of expression in artistic contexts that the sadness must be "incorporated or embodied in, or . . . fused with, the music."[8] According to Tomas, however, the "two-terms" theory can give no successful account of how the two terms can be apprehended as one, and his conclusion is that we must reject associationist theory and adopt what he considers to be the only other possible position, that sadness is "literally in" the music.[9] Tomas' discussion of this issue, however, is not satisfactory.

In the first place, it is unhelpful to speak of sadness as being literally in music, or any other emotion-term having a literal application to an artwork. As E. F. Carritt claimed, if sadness were in the music in that sense, we might feel obliged to cheer it up.[10] In fact, when Tomas sets forth the "one-term" theory, he gives Pratt and Langer as examples, both of whose positions only entitle them to claim that music resembles sadness in people, something quite different from the claim that sadness is literally in music.

---

[7] Vincent Tomas, "The Concept of Expression in Art," reprinted in Philosophy Lookes at the Arts (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 32.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 39.

Secondly, Tomas' criticism of the possibility of defending a two-terms theory of expression is mistaken. The problem Tomas cites is that of showing how one can speak of two terms and at the same time require that they are fused together, or "confounded" in perception, in such a way that they are "apprehended" as one. The answer is that if the two terms are really distinct, we cannot, and, therefore, do not apprehend them as one. What we perceive is one thing, viz, musical sound. We do not perceive what the musical sound means or expresses because meaning is not something perceived at all. Or, to put it another way, we do not "apprehend" the music in the same sense as we "apprehend" its meaning. In the first case, "apprehend" means "perceive," while in the latter it means "understand." "Meaning" is not a substantive and does not designate an object that can be perceived at all. Tomas' continual references to what is expressed as "an object," or even "a term," simply serve to mislead him in this article.

---

[10] A remark of Carritt's quoted in Alan Tormey, The Concept of Expression (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 127.

Once this ambiguity is pointed out, the "two-terms" theory becomes considerably easier to defend. For, what we can say is that the first term consists of the sounds constituting the music, and the second term consists of the associated meanings which the music may have due to generally accepted perceptual conventions related to music of that style.

In defending as associationist position on musical meaning, I am explicitly going against the position that music has no meaning but is only described metaphorically as sad, cheerful, etc.[11] I would like to say here that I believe this account to be defective for at least two reasons. First, there is no generally acceptable account of what a metaphor actually is, and it is not very helpful to give an account of musical expression in terms of a concept that is at least as unclear as the one to be analyzed. Moreover, it is not clear that metaphorical description does not depend in large measure on perceived resemblances, and if so, then the account of expression I have given based on association includes the account of metaphor. Secondly, the concept of metaphor does not explain the role of the major-minor modes in determining expressive content. The role of the modal system in expression is much less difficult to understand on the assumption of the operation of a perceptual convention, than on the notion of metaphorical description. The theory of metaphorical description leaves one wondering just why changing the modality of a given melody can change its expressive content in the manner that it does.

---

[11] Monroe Beardsley, op. cit., p. 328.

Finally, in holding that absolute music does have meaning in virtue of association, I am not setting forth a theory of absolute music. It is not being claimed here, as it was claimed by Langer and Cooke, that it is the nature, or essence, or is a defining property, of music that it have meaning. All that is being maintained here is that at least some compositions of absolute music do have associated meanings. Furthermore, it is not being held that these works are valuable solely in virtue of the associated meanings they may have. Nothing I have urged here implies this thesis, and I shall expressly repudiate it in Section Three of this chapter.

2) The Relevance of Musical Meaning to Appreciation.

So far, I have argued that music does have meaning based on the concept of association. But, it has been regarded as an entirely separate issue by Formalist musical aesthetics whether attention to musical meaning is relevant to its appreciation and value. That is, even if it is true that a sense can be made out for music having meaning, it would be held by those committed to a Formalist theory of music that musical meaning should be ignored in the proper experience of music. For example, if someone were to refer to the expressive content of a symphony as tragic, a Formalist would urge him to disregard any associations to extra-musical situations and attend carefully to the structure of the presented sounds. In this section I shall consider what reasons, there are for holding that attention to musical expressive meaning must be irrelevant to musical appreciation. This position turns on one main assumption, and I shall argue here that this assumption is misguided.

The main assumption for the Formalist doctrine of the irrelevancy of expression to proper musical experience can be found in _The Beautiful in Music_. The assumption is that sensory content must be attended to in order to become aware of musical worth.

> The beautiful . . . affects our senses. . . . Sensation (is) the beginning and condition of aesthetic enjoyment. "Sensation" is the act of perceiving some sensible quality such as a sound or a color. . . .[12]

In order to perceive the aesthetic worth of music, one must attend to the sounds presented. This is the rationale for Hanslick's motto that "the essence of music is sound and motion."[13] However, in the case of expression, we do not attend to the sounds themselves, but rather to what the sounds express. Hanslick contrasts music with language to illustrate this:

---

[12] Edward Hanslick, _op_. _cit_., p. 10.

> The fundamental difference consists in this: while sound in speech is but a sign, that is a means for the purpose of expressing something which is quite distinct from its medium, sound in music is the end, that is the ultimate and absolute object in view. The intrinsic beauty of the musical forms in the latter case, and the exclusive dominion of thought over sound as a mere medium of expression in the former, are so utterly distinct as to render the union of these two elements a logical impossibility.[14]

That which is expressed is "quite distinct" from the sounds themselves which are the locus of attention and value. Again, if we attend to what is expressed, we are simply missing that which is of value in music so that attention to expression is simply the wrong sort of thing to do for appreciation. The trouble is we are attending to the wrong content: we should be attending to the sensory content itself rather than what that content may mean or express.

This kind of Formalist argument to disprove the possibility of the relevance of musical meaning is more common than one might suspect. A notable example is the influential article by Richard Rudner, "On Semiotic Aesthetics,"[15] where the following is stated:

---

[13] Ibid., p. 48.

[14] Ibid., pp. 67-8.

[15] Richard Rudner, "On Semiotic Aesthetics," JAAC, Vol. X, 1951, pp. 67-77.

> To hold that the aesthetic object is a sign has as a consequence that not only must we take account of, say, a Bach Partita or a Prokofiev sonata as a necessary condition for something which we call an aesthetic experience of that music, but also as a necessary condition we must take account of something which music signifies.[16]

According to Rudner this consequence is "counterintuitive."

> An analysis which holds that it is not what in ordinary usage we call "the aesthetic object" which consummates aesthetically, but rather something signified by that object, or even that object together with what it signifies, seems to me less preferable to a theory which holds that it is what we ordinarily call the aesthetic object which consummates.[17]

What we ordinarily call the aesthetic object in regard to music is just the presented sounds and not what the sounds may mean, or even the sounds together with what they may mean. The aesthetic object "consummates immediately,"[18] according to Rudner but anything which has meaning functions mediately as a sign for something else. Attention to any associated meanings is, therefore, inconsistent with attention to the musical object in virtue of attention being misdirected away from the presented sounds. We have the same conclusion of musical Formalism that attention to musical meaning must be irrelevant to musical appreciation.

---

[16] Richard Rudner, _op_. _cit_., p. 72.

[17] _Ibid_., p. 73.

[18] _Ibid_., p. 73.

Both of these arguments turn on the assumption that perception of a certain content is necessary for aesthetic appreciation. The content in question for the case of music is the sound itself which is distinguished from what it may express. That there is such a distinction between sound as a presented sensory content and what the sound may mean is as indisputable for music as for ordinary speech. In this latter case we may attend to the sound of a person's voice, as he utters a sentence for example, without necessarily attending to the meaning of what he says. The questionable assumption in these arguments, however, is that it is necessary for musical experience to be properly called "aesthetic" that attention should be focussed exclusively on presented sensory content.

It is not the case that one need preserve the traditional "immediacy" of aesthetic experience by requiring that the content experienced be immediate in the sense that one should perceive the sounds themselves rather than what they may mean. To insist on this as a necessary condition of the aesthetic is to confuse immediacy of perceived content with immediacy of value. It is true that aesthetic experience can be of immediate value in that it can be valuable as such, and not as a means for attaining some other thing. A sunset can be aesthetically valuable in virtue of being good to perceive. But it would simply be a confusion to insist that a nicely turned phrase could not really be aesthetically valuable on the grounds that we enjoyed what was meant rather than focussing our attention on presented sensory content.

Beyond the simple ambiguity of the "immediate" character of aesthetic experience, however, the doctrine that the aesthetic must involve sensation runs into difficulties most obviously with representational art forms. In the case of literature, the sensory content, words on pages, is not the object of aesthetic interest, but rather what the words express or mean. Even more relevant to the case of musical meaning is poetry where attention is directed to the sounds of the words and what the words mean. Again, if one accepts the doctrine in question, then attention to any form of symbolism in the arts is irrelevant to aesthetic appreciation. In the appreciation of Nineteenth century symbolist painting, for example, our attention is aesthetic only in so far as we ignore the symbols in the works. Understanding of these works, however, involves relating the symbols to the represented objects on the canvas.

However, an alternative account of aesthetic attention, which does not have to meet such difficulties, can be given. Rather than require that "aesthetic" qualify certain objects of attention, "immediate sensory contents," it is better in light of the above objections, to require that "aesthetic" modify attention itself. The position recommended here is that aesthetic experience is an experience that results when one's attention is directed to any content simply for the sake of the possible satisfactions that such attention may provide. In what follows I shall elaborate this position on aesthetic experience and defend it against some objections.

The simplest cases of the kind of experience in question are cases of the satisfaction taken in smells and tastes. When one smells a rose, for example, for the purpose of enjoying its fragrance, one's attention is aesthetic and the experience of so doing is an aesthetic experience. It would be mistaken, however, to construe perception in such instances as paradigmatic and make content a necessary condition of aesthetic experience even though the etymology of the term "aesthetic," which relates it to sensory content, may suggest this. For, in addition to the examples mentioned above, which show difficulties of applying such a doctrine to certain art forms, one can cite the case of the satisfactions taken by the mathematician or scientist in their work. It is ordinarily appropriate to use the traditional value category of beauty in connection with scientific theories, and elegance in regard to mathematical proofs which certainly implies that the domain of the aesthetic extends to what can be contemplated intellectually. If sensory content is required for one's experience to be aesthetic, the traditional aesthetic terms of beauty and elegance should be misapplied in this domain.

It is considerably easier to believe, however, that their application is correct and the doctrine in question is simply false.

In speaking of aesthetic experience as involving possible satisfactions, I intend to deny specifically that such experience is necessarily valuable. That aesthetic experience is not necessarily of value can be easily seen by reference to the cases of smelling and tasting. Some food is unpleasant to taste, and there is no reason for denying that someone who smells a rotten onion is having an aesthetic experience merely on the grounds that he did not find the experience enjoyable. Furthermore, there are many musical works composed in the Twentieth Century that concert-goers have not enjoyed, due to the preponderance of dissonance where there is no reason to suppose that they were not attending to the object for the sake of experiencing it. Aesthetic experience is not necessarily valuable, then, but can be so when the experience of an object is found to be worthwhile simply as an experience.

The concept of aesthetic experience that I have outlined preserves the relevancy of musical meaning to musical experience. For, I have maintained that attention to the associated meanings of absolute music cannot be disqualified as non-aesthetic on the grounds that attention is directed away from the (true) aesthetic object which is the sounds presented to the senses. If any object can be experienced aesthetically, the associated meanings of music can be as well, and in this respect the experience of absolute music can be very much like that of poetry in which attention to both sounds and what the sounds mean is relevant to its proper experience.

The move that will be made at this point by those persuaded by Formalist aesthetics will be to admit the narrowness of restricting the aesthetic to the sensory, but to rule out attention to musical meaning on evaluative grounds. It will be affirmed, that is, that associated meanings can play no role in the aesthetic value of absolute music in virtue of the categories of value in such music being exclusively organizational in character. In the following section I shall take up the issue of value in absolute music and consider the merit of this move.

3) The Aesthetic Value of Musical Meaning.

There is one further issue that must be discussed, then, in order to reconcile the opposing positions of Formalism and Expressionism, the issue of musical value. Recapitulating briefly, the issues are these. The Expressionists are convinced of the value of musical meaning although they hold that musical meaning must be shown to have cognitive value. The Formalists, however, are convinced that musical meaning plays no part in the aesthetic worth of music. My aims are to show that musical meaning can be a source of aesthetic interest in absolute music, and that both of these positions are mistaken on the issue of the value of absolute music.

Why has it been maintained that the value of absolute music is exclusively formal in character? There are a number of considerations that have been brought out by those sympathetic to Formalist musical aesthetics that should be examined. I shall discuss the views of composers on this issue as well as the positions of the Classical Formalists, Hanslick and Gurney. My aim is to show that they do not make out their case for Formalist aesthetics.

Some Formalist arguments are based in an alleged impossibility of defending the concept of expression in absolute music. Stravinsky, for example, holds that music is by its very nature not capable of being used to express anything.[19] If so, then absolute music can be only a formal organization of tones, and, as such, it can only be an interesting or an uninteresting auditory perceptual structure. The argument here, however, is based on requiring that music express something definite that anyone could agree to and is, therefore, based on a mistaken concept of expression. Musical expression is not precise, as we have seen, but it is not totally imprecise either. If someone described the finale to Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony as sad music, he would simply be mistaken, but its precise affective content might still be disagreed on. It can be cheerful, jubilant, ecstatic, frenzied, or even hysterical. To allow for an element of subjectivity in musical expression, however, is not to dismiss the possibility of musical expressiveness altogether.

---

[19] Igor Stravinsky, Chronicle of my Life, quoted in Deryck Cooke, op. cit., p. 11.

Again, some Formalist arguments assume that expression is identical to evocation, and argue the impossibility of expression on this ground. Hindemith rules out the possibility of musical expression holding that if one composition, a symphony, expressed sadness, then joy, and ended with despair, it would require that human beings possess an incredible emotional versatility to experience such feelings in less than the hour it takes to play the composition.[20] But, if one denies the identity of expression and evocation, and maintains only that musical expression of feeling is experienced empathetically sometimes, then this consequence does not follow.

Furthermore, the assumption that expressed feeling is evoked in listeners has lead some Formalists to hold that if music were to express feeling, it would interfere with attention to the structural features of music. How could one attend to the way a theme is developed or varied if he were under the sway of strong feeling? It is this view of expression that prompts Hanslick to maintain that

---

[20] Paul Hindemith, op. cit., p. 57.

> with the uninitiated "the feelings" play a predominant part, while, in the case of the trained musician they are quite in the background.[21] Instead of closely following the course of the music, these enthusiasts . . . suffer themselves to be rocked and lulled by the mere flow of sound.[22]

Again, however, the rejection of the identity of expression and evocation allows for the appreciation of formal values and expressive values, rather than placing them in opposition to one another.

Not only was it thought that expression prevented attention to form, however, it was thought that the Expression theory, as a rival theory to Formalism, could not account for musical value on its own terms. How could the evocation of feelings and emotions that one experienced in ordinary daily life be the sole provence of music?

> Take twenty bits of music, each presenting the same definable character, such as melancholy or triumph. Now if the stirring of this emotion is _the whole business_ of any one of these tunes, how is anybody the richer for knowing the other nineteen?[23]

The argument here is that a theory which holds it to be the nature of music to evoke in listeners feelings that may be experienced in ordinary, extra-musical situations cannot explain why such an endeavor would be of any value. If this were the whole story of Expressionist theory, the theory would be as incredible as Hanslick's and Gurney's polemic would imply. The fact that they take Expressionist theory to be so wildly implausible functions to show why they put forth the theory of musical formalism in its stead. Based on a consideration of the most simple form of Expressionist Theory, they go to the opposite theoretical extreme of holding that, rather than the "whole business" of music being the stirring of simple emotions, on the contrary, the whole business of music is creating totally abstract, unified structure of sound. Formalist theory, in other words, was at least in part a polemical over-reaction against simple Expression Theories of the time.

---

[21] Edward Hanslick, _op_. _cit_., p. 99.

[22] _Ibid_., pp. 90-1.

[23] Edmund Gurney, _op_. _cit_., p. 341.

We can agree that any such simple theory of music as expression cannot be defended. We can also agree that the Formalist values of thematic organization and development are relevant to musical value. But we need not agree as a consequence that no case whatsoever can be made out for the value of musical expression as I have outlined it in section one of this chapter. I shall turn now to a discussion of Hanslick's positive arguments which purport to show that musical worth must be exclusively Formal in character.

The position that the value of absolute music depends exclusively upon its formal organization as tone has its theoretical origins with the writing of Hanslick. It was a central assumption of Hanslick that the main task of any art form was the creation of the beautiful.

> An art aims, above all, at producing something beautiful which affects not our feelings but the organ of pure contemplation, our imagination.[24]

Hanslick cites Johann Friedrich Herbart in support of this statement, but otherwise never bothers to argue for it in his work. In effect, he treats this claim as if it were a simple fact agreed on by everyone. Furthermore, it is an implicit assumption of Hanslick that the conditions of beauty are to be found in good form:

> The beautiful, strictly speaking, aims at nothing, since it is nothing but a form which . . . has, as such, no aim beyond itself.[25]

Of course, if it is granted that the nature of art is the creation of the beautiful, and that beauty is formal in character, then Hanslick's Formalist musical aesthetics follows with no difficulty.

Although the definition of beauty was a main concern of aesthetics in the Eighteenth century, it is not true that it was generally accepted in Hanslick's time that the function of art was the creation of the beautiful. The dominant theory of art, indeed, was the Mimetic Theory whereby the nature and function of art was thought to be imitation. So, Hanslick was not stating something that was generally agreed upon in art theory and that could serve as a suitable starting point for his position on music.

---

[24] Hanslick, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

However this may be, there is considerable reason for thinking this assumption to be false. It is difficult to reconcile the Beauty Theory of Art with the existence of tragedies, _Oedipus Rex_, for example. The depiction of the ugly and horrible is not limited to works which are only questionably art. One only need think of works by Goya, Tolstoy, and Picasso in this respect, and there is no question that _Guernica_, _War and Peace_, and _The Third of May, 1808_ are works of art. A theory which begins with an assumption which rules out such established works cannot be descriptive in character.

There is yet another argument offered by Hanslick which I shall discuss briefly. The argument turns on whether music should be thought of as a means for something or as an end in itself. According to Hanslick, if music is thought of as expression, it must be thought of as a means, namely a means for expressing feeling.

> On the one hand it is said that the aim and object of music is to excite emotions. . . . ; on the other hand, the emotions are said to be the subject matter which musical works are intended to illustrate.[26]

In both cases music functions as a means. In virtue of this these positions are alleged to be inconsistent with the aesthetic worth of music.

---

[26] Hanslick, _op_. _cit_., p. 9.

> The beautiful, strictly speaking, aims at nothing, since it is nothing but a form which . . . has, as such, no aim beyond itself.[27]

If music is the expression of feeling, then it is a means, and should be valued as a means, in accord with its efficacy in achieving its end. However, music is not valued as a means but rather as an end in itself, so that musical expression of feeling is inconsistent with what must be accepted about the aesthetic worth of music.

The assumption in this argument is that if something is a means, then it must always be experienced and appreciated as such. This, however, is not true. There are many things which serve a function which can nevertheless be viewed aesthetically as ends in themselves. An automobile has the function of transportation, but it can be viewed as an object of intrinsic worth as well. An automobile may simply be beautiful to look at apart from its utility. Similarly, even in the cases where expression has a function, we can nevertheless view the expression apart from its function. We can consider it as an object of perceptual interest apart from whatever end it may serve as a means to accomplish. To consider it as such is to consider it as an expression apart from its function. Even if music did serve the function of expressing the feelings of the composer, therefore, we could consider the music itself as an expression apart from its utility, and to consider it in this way is to consider it aesthetically as a source of possible satisfactions. Hanslick's argument, then, does not show that attention to musical meaning is inconsistent with valuing music aesthetically.

---

[27] Hanslick, op. cit., p. 9.

So far I have examined Formalist considerations that purport to disprove the value of expression in absolute music, and I have sought to establish that these considerations are not sufficient to preclude musical meaning from aesthetic interest. The thesis of Formalist musical aesthetics that is correct is that the value of absolute music is aesthetic in character, which means at least that the satisfactions it provides are valuable not as means for producing anything else. Hanslick's influence, in particular, is due to what he had to say on the subject of the aesthetic worth of absolute music, not on the proper mode of experiencing it. I shall not proceed to examine the opposite side of the value issue, the claim of the Expressionists that absolute music must be shown to have cognitive value to have more than trivial worth. My aim here is to show that Expressionist assumptions about the Formalist's account of musical value are mistaken as well.

The argument that Expressionists give on the issue of value is as follows. We are given a choice between accepting that absolute music really does have value to culture, a proposition that is certainly true, or accepting the thesis of Formalism, which allegedly amounts to valuing absolute music for its merely sensuous pleasures. If we take the second alternative, it is held to be obvious that there is no difference between one who appreciates absolute music and a (mere) wine bibber,[28] that is, the appreciation of absolute music is uniformly of a kind with the sensory pleasures of food and drink.[29] Since the second alternative is clearly unacceptable, we must opt for the first, and show that absolute music enlarges the fund of knowledge, and we have the Expressionist Theories of Langer, Cooke, and others. If one grants the validity of this disjunction, then the Expressionist position on musical value becomes plausible but, as it is, it should not be granted.

It is mistaken to think that aesthetic value is identified with sensory pleasures. To begin with, the aesthetic value of objects of nature is not adequately characterized as exclusively sensory pleasure. It is true that such pleasure can be taken in a beautiful sky or a beautiful sunset, but such experiences do not exhaust the aesthetic in natural objects. The aesthetic experience of nature can also be sublime as in the comtemplation of an imposing mountain range, or the vastness of the Universe when seen on a clear, quiet night. In such cases there is a feeling of awe at the immensity of the objects at hand, and it would be quite wrong to suggest that such experiences are of the same kind as experiences resulting from (say) the tasting of a fine, white wine. It is obvious that experiences of the sublime are thought to be of high value even though their value is not cognitive in character.

---

[28] H. W. N. Sullivan, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[29] Suzanne Langer, *Feeling and Form*, op. cit., p. 28, and Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music*, *op. cit.*, p. x.

The experience of the sublime can be elicited in appreciation of works of art as well. One need only turn to the late works of the English painter William Turner for confirmation of this. In regard to music it is well known that in the mid-Nineteenth century the symphony orchestra expanded to twice the size of the court ensembles that performed the works of Haydn and Mozart. The explanation of this expansion is to be found in changing aesthetic interests of the composers of this time. There was less interest in creating works of music which were beautiful, and more interest in creating works of vast scope that would qualify as magnificent, or sublime. Mahler's Eighth Symphony ("The Symphony of a Thousand") is a good example, but the opening measures of Strauss' tone poem Also Sprach Zarathustra are, no doubt, more familiar.

Furthermore, there is an implication in the claim that music must be relegated to the sensuously valuable, that musical appreciation is exclusively a sensing with no use of the intellectual faculties. Unless one is a Puritan, of course, there is nothing wrong with pleasure taken in the sensuous. Moreover, the case of absolute music presents us with a case in which such sensory pleasures abound. There is immense reward to be found in experiencing the sound of certain pieces of music. One can take pleasure in the sheen of the strings, the brilliance of brass and percussion, the delicacy of sound of the oboe and flute. But, it is wrong to think that reference to such qualities exhausts the reasons which can be validly given for the worth of absolute music. In this respect the Formalists were quite correct in their insistence upon attention to form in the experience of music.

Appreciation of musical organization is a skill that requires intense intellectual concentration. In order to appreciate the standard formal qualities of balance and symmetry in a given composition, for example, one must know what has occurred in the temporal process of musical development. This requires that one must be able to have a grasp of the whole musical process, to see it with the minds' eye, all at once, so to speak. The intellectual activity that is required to do this is obviously cognitive in character requiring that one know the events that transpire, and not simply a sensing of the sounds of the composition. The appreciation of polyphonic music, a Bach fugue, for example, requires attention to at least two and sometimes as many as four or five melodic lines at the same time. Again, in order to appreciate a composition in the form of theme and variations, such as Brahms' Variations on a Theme of Haydn, it is necessary to be able to see how the variations on the selected theme are variations, a skill that requires that one recall the harmonic progressions of the original theme. The aesthetic appreciation of absolute music is not, therefore, simply a pleasure taken in its sound, but an activity requiring considerable concentration.

Moreover, Formalist musical aesthetics is correct in its insistence upon the relevance of appreciating the organizational aspects of musical structure as a means to understanding musical value. A musical composition that is not unified must overcome a serious deficiency in order to provide aesthetic satisfaction. In this respect, Hanslick's criticisms of the program music of Franz Liszt and the symphonies of Anton Bruckner are relevant to an adequate assessment of the merits of these works. Again, it is a strong point for favorable evaluation of the music of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and Mozart that their compositions are usually well-worked out and unified. It is this high degree of unity that provides many with such profound aesthetic satisfaction.

The Expressionists, therefore, misrepresented the aesthetic experience of absolute music in their attempt to discredit musical Formalism. But, furthermore, they fail to establish the aesthetic value of musical expressive meaning, and thereby demonstrate the narrowness of Formalist theory. The mistake of the Formalists was to insist that attention only to form was requisite for musical appreciation. Musical meaning, however, as well as musical form, provides satisfaction that qualifies as legitimately aesthetic. Based on the notion of aesthetic experience set forth in section two of this chapter, the aesthetic worth of musical meaning can now be shown. The concept of aesthetic experience set forth there was that such experience occurred when any object was attended to for the sake of possible satisfactions that such attention might provide. All that is required now is to show how musical meaning can function to yield such satisfactions in the experience of music.

There are two ways in which musical meaning contributes to the aesthetic value of absolute music. First, one can find interest in expression in music simply as expression. The sadness, wistfulness, tenderness, frenzy, generally the mood of certain passages, can be interesting just as expression and nothing more. Such expression can be recognized and noticed or experienced empathetically in very much the same manner as the aesthetic appreciation of nature or the human form. The violence of a turbulent sky, the tranquility of a mountain stream, or the solitude of a vast forest can all be appreciated and valued aesthetically.

Similarly, a face can be interesting as expression, and not for the sake of the possible information that the expression might convey. Indeed, in these cases, as well as the cases of nature, there is no question of the interest being cognitive. Indeed, if one's interest is in finding out something about natural objects, such interest is sufficient to disqualify attention as aesthetic. Similarly, for the case of music, the exortations of critics to notice musical expression is not for the sake of anything we may find out about what is expressed, but simply for the sake of appreciating the expression.

Secondly, musical expressive meaning functions to provide dramatic form to compositions. No better illustration of this point can be found than Donald Tovey's discussion of sonata form. The problem is to explain why the sonata is in three movements having no related thematic content:

> Why do the classical sonatas maintain this scheme of self-centered movements with no community of theme? The answer to this in the relation between their time scale and their emotional content. . . . In its later developments the individual movements, while complete as designs, raise emotional issues which each movement is unable to satisfy without the others. . . . The emotional unity of the sonata is already significant in Mozart and Haydn.[30]

The movements themselves are "complete as designs," as

---

[30] Sir Donald Tovey, The Forms of Music (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1956), p. 230.

Formalist aesthetics would require, but this sense of form is not sufficient to describe the classical sonata. Beyond abstract design is another sense of form, the dramatic form which insures the "emotional unity" of the sonata. The completeness of the sonata depends not only on abstract thematic design and development, but also involves dramatic completeness as well.

The presence of dramatic form is especially predominant in large scale musical works such as the symphony:

> Tragedy, drama, pathos (are) basic attributes of a symphonic language. . . .[31]

Superiority in treating the dramatic element is even given as a reason for ranking some works higher than others in terms of symphonic achievement.

> In comparing . . . Prokofieff and Shostakovich one cannot escape the conclusion that Shostakovich is more uneven. Prokofieff . . . in terms of pure musicianship . . . is undoubtedly the finer composer. And yet Shostakovich's ultimate achievement seems to me to be greater. Prokofieff . . . never matches the Shostakovich of the *Tenth* in depth or range of feeling. Shostakovich goes much further than Prokofieff in his sense of compassion and his capacity for suffering. There seems to be a greater awareness of the tragedy of the human condition.[32]

There is more to composing great symphonies than "pure musicianship," the ability to compose and develop themes. The great symphonists are masters not only of the purely formal aspect of their craft, but possess a skill for dramatic unity as well.

---

[31] Peter Jona Korn, "The Symphony in America," in *The Symphony* Vol. II, Robert Simpson, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 254.

[32] Robert Layton, "Dmitri Shostakovich," *Ibid.*, p. 199.

If these points about the aesthetic value of musical meaning are realized, then the dispute between Expressionists and Formalists can be resolved. For, the Expressionists can be seen to be correct in their insistence upon the value of musical meaning in absolute music. What must be realized on their view is that musical meaning functions to enhance the aesthetic value of absolute music and one need not apologize for this by showing that expression really functions cognitively. The Formalists, on the other hand, are correct in their contention that the worth of absolute music is aesthetic in character, but mistaken in the claim that only formal values, defined in terms of abstract structural design, are relevant to musical worth. As in nearly any interesting dispute, both sides have an element of truth, as well as an element of falsehood. If the element of truth were not present conviction would be absent on both sides. On the other hand, if the element of falsehood were not in existence, there would not be the possibility of disputation. It is the purpose of philosophical analysis to distinguish these disparate elements and resolve disputes which by their very nature prevent adequate understanding and insight, and this has been the purpose of the present essay.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beardsley, Monroe. A Short History of Aesthetics. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966.

Beardsley, Monroe. Aesthetics. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1958.

Carritt, E. F. What is Beauty? Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1932.

Clarke, Henry Leland. "The Basis of Musical Communication." The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism X:242-6.

Collingwood, R. G. The Principles of Art. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938.

Cooke, Deryck. "Review of recordings of the Symphonies of Anton Bruckner." The Gramophone, XLV:318.

Cooke, Deryck. The Language of Music. Paperback. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Croce, Benedetto. Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic. Translated by Douglas Ainslie. Paperback. New York: The Noonday Press, 1963.

Dewey, John. Art as Experience. Paperback. New York: Capricorn Books, 1958.

Ducasse, Curt J. "Art and the Language of the Emotions." A Modern Book of Aesthetics, Fourth edition, edited by Melvin Rader. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972:69-72.

Ducasse, Curt J. The Philosophy of Art. Paperback. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966.

Epperson, Gordon. The Musical Symbol. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1967.

Flew, Anthony. Logic and Language. New York: Anchor Books, 1965.

Gurney, Edmund. The Power of Sound. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966.

Hanslick, Edward. The Beautiful in Music. Paperback. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1957.

Hindemith, Paul. A Composer's World. Paperback. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1961.

Langer, Suzanne K. Feeling and Form. Paperback. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953.

Langer, Suzanne K. Philosophy in a New Key. Paperback. New York: The New American Library, 1951.

Langer, Suzanne K. Problems of Art. Paperback. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957.

Layton, Robert. "Review of a recording of the Eleventh Symphony of Dmitri Shostakovich." The Gramophone, XLVI:399.

Mahler, Alma. Memories and Letters. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968.

Mellars, Wilfrid. Man and His Music, Parts III, IV. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Morris, Charles. "Esthetics and the Theory of Signs." Journal of Unified Science VIII:131-50.

Osborne, Harold. Introduction to Aesthetics, edited by Harold Osborne. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Pratt, Carroll C. "The Design of Music." The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XII:289-300.

Reid, Louis A. Meaning in the Arts. New York: Humanities Press, 1969.

Rudner, Richard. "On Semiotic Aesthetics." The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, X:67-77.

Santayana, George. The Sense of Beauty. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.

Sessions, Roger. "The Composer and his Message." *A Modern Book of Aesthetics*, Fourth Edition, edited by Melvin Rader, New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972:300-8.

"Sibelius, Jean." *An Evening with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra*. Chicago: Naxwell Scroge Co., Inc., 1973.

Simpson, Robert. *The Symphony*. Volumes I and II. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967.

Stravinsky, Igor. *Poetics of Music*. Paperback. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957.

Sullivan, J. W. N. *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*. Paperback. New York: Random House, Inc., 1927.

Tolstoy, Leo. *What is Art?* Paperback. Indianapolis: The Bobbs Merrill Co., Inc., 1960.

Tomas, Vincent. "The Concept of Expression in Art." *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, edited by Joseph Margolis. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962.

Tormey, Alan. *The Concept of Expression*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

Tovey, Sir Donald. *The Forms of Music*. New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1956.

Weitz, Morris. Introduction to *The Beautiful in Music* by Edward Hanslick. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1957.

TITLE OF THESIS "THE PROBLEM OF MUSICAL MEANING"

Major Professor Professor Donald W. Crawford

Major Department Philosophy

Minor(s) Music and Psychology

LLEN

Full Name Paul A. Brown

Place and Date of Birth Clinton, Oklahoma May 28, 1940

Colleges and Universities: Years attended and degrees

Florida State University 1958-62 BA; Florida State University

1962-64 MA; University of Wisconsin 1965-70 Ph.D.

Membership in Learned or Honorary Societies

Publications

Date